

Let Your Lives Speak video project

Interim report March- November 2021

Overview:

- The project has resonated with Friends around Australia.
- The visioning of the videos and possible topics has been an exciting process.
- The importance of good technical videoing and editing skills is a priority for the project. We realized that these skills are not in great supply among Friends in Australia
- Identifying actual footage for videos has taken some time and the lack of suitable, available footage has required some re-thinking about the possibilities of topics for the videos.
- Developing and finding suitable materials is an emerging process and we need to work with several possibilities, prioritizing as circumstances present.
- Since this is a pilot project, surveying opportunities for video making for Australian Quakers, whatever our first video or two turn out to be, we are likely to suggest a few more that could be developed and which may have been developed to some point.
- The covid lockdowns have limited making new video footage, suitable for use in the new videos.
- The work is continuing. A work in progress report will be made to Standing Committee.

1. The development of the project

This project came about when Wies Schuiringa became involved in the “Raising Peace” festival, based in Sydney, first in 2020 and then again in 2021 on behalf of NSWWRM. The initial festival was planned to be in-person, with videos by participating peace organisations. Quakers in Australia don’t have videos about “Quakers and Peace” and this seemed like a good time to start making one or more.

Wies is not a videographer and knew from experience that making a good video requires appropriate lighting, good sound, videoing and editing skills. After some asking around, Elizabeth PO’ and Adrian Glamorgan from Fremantle Meeting were approached and keen to become part of the project. They have media experience, make radio programs and have used editing software.

As the Covid pandemic limited and then stopped having in-person gatherings, the “Raising Peace” festival in September 2021 developed into a large online Zoom event over 10 days. A short video about Quakers and Peace in Australia would have been lost in between 37 other sessions. However, the project remains valuable for Quakers in Australia and globally to document our history as early peace makers in a new colony as well as in more current times. It was decided not to aim for a video to be ready by September 2021, but instead by AYM’s AGM in January 2022.

In seeking to define the project outcomes, it is more than the videos we produce, as an exploration of what it will take for Friends to be ‘video-savvy’. Our modern culture is visual-rich, and people (especially young people) tend not to read books or tracts. We also have our own Australian Quaker culture in photographs, and also in oral histories (mostly unrecorded), and to a much lesser extent in videos. This project is therefore a discovery exercise: to try and connect Meetings with their

overlooked resources. We have sought to activate or inspire groups to make their own videos, or at the very least to identify videographers, older Friends with stories, photographs and other resources held by Meetings and in the keeping of Friends.

The title for the video project, which includes both making pilot videos and helping discover what resources might be linked to our Meetings, is “Let Your Lives Speak”.

AYM’s Peace and Social Justice fund provided \$5500 for editing time and software costs, as well as for a marketing component to ensure that videos are engaged with by local meetings to maximise their usefulness for education purposes and outreach. We spoke to one documentary maker who emphasized the importance of not releasing videos immediately to Youtube, as she had done, as it effectively dissipates and underutilises their potential. Rather, we were encouraged to create events, which can build community and deepen videos’ educational and spiritual impact. This fitted well with our notion that the project is about activation as well as information.

2. Envisioning the project

Since March 2021 regular (mostly weekly) Zoom meetings have been held to develop a vision for the videos, including to share initial edited footage of involvement in peace making all its diversity since 1770 including a scripted voice-over, also segments of new interviews with Quakers about their peacemaking, review related images where there is a lack of original footage, and consider an original sound track to reflect the mood of the video. All of this engendered a “wow’ response, continuing to encourage and inspire our ongoing work.

Quakers have been involved in a lot of human rights and social justice work without this being explicitly peace work, all demonstrating actions based on the Peace Testimony. Working for a more peaceful world has been implicit, embedded in our culture. The concepts of “no peace without justice” and “faith in action” are well known to Quakers. Quakers have brought strength and clarity when joining with others for peaceful outcomes. It is about our motivation to work for peace, based on our faith, the centrality of the Meeting for Worship and sustained by the Quaker community.

Some Quakers live out their testimonies more inwardly, while others also living outwardly in action. In all ways there is an awareness of the wellspring-like centrality of Peace while working for a more harmonious society and also for the natural environment.

Australians increasingly consume their primary information via the internet, and, as mentioned, written materials may have less reach into the community. Friends have not engaged much with video making, although QuakerSpeak has been an innovation that has shown the helpfulness of resources for spiritual formation within Friends, and for outreach.

The audience for “Let Your Lives Speak” would be Quakers in Australia and elsewhere, spiritual seekers and the general public.

We believed that this project might help activate a network around the country, help preserve some of Friends’ historical records, and stories of older Friends in meetings around the country.

We also believed there could be opportunities for developing Quaker culture. For example, in seeking to create a soundtrack, so the music might become part of Friends’ lexicon.

By embarking on this process, and making two videos as pilots, we believe we can share with Friends what might be possible for the future. Some of the mechanics behind this process have included the following:-

Filmmaking

- Nonfiction filmmaking skills involve the ability to envision a storyline
- Interviews, techniques and coverage
- record high quality video and audio (to meet expectations of contemporary culture which consumes content every day)
- manage lighting
- identify a narrative out of the clips collected and research
- edit via complex software,
- Critique, review, assess
- distribute.
- This is high-labour and -skill intensive.
- Covid-19 made travel, and hence in-person interviews, impossible.

Saving memories

- It was hoped that Regional Meetings and Friends generally might: identify a contact person within their meeting with whom we could work; identify interviewers and videographers within their meeting whom we could brief so they could then interview older members of the meeting for memories of peace work from earlier generation; and locate historical information and visuals from meetings suitable for videos, which could support our filmmaking but also preserve the content for other creative uses. We envisioned any material would be identified and placed on a national database to assist Friends preserving historical records.
- We prepared materials to help anyone walk through the technology setup requirements and to join in with the project. While we found Friends were enthusiastic about videos being made, and we got one or two helpful replies, (and a short video interview with Peter Jones from TRM) no one stepped forward with an interest in developing professional video skills or to be “walked through” the process. When we could find video materials made by Friends (e.g. at protests), we found limited visuals, often of low resolution, quite short, sometimes with limited audio. We did ask each Regional Meeting to send us a photo of their meeting house with Friends standing outside it. No one has forwarded this yet. With many demands on volunteers, we should not be surprised by this.
- An absence of visuals requires a re-thinking of the video process. Interviews were held with a few Friends by Zoom around Australia, but audiences expect more from their visuals. Notwithstanding this, we have interviewed via Zoom Dale Hess, Alan Clayton and Sabine Erika about her experience as a refugee, and some of this material might work

with other resources. We have an audio recording of a conversation with Charles Stevenson. There was a chance of a Friend involved in West Papua work coming to Western Australia, but the trip was cancelled within days of his planned arrival because of a covid lockdown. A short interview with Peter Jones was gratefully received from TRM.

Producing arts and creativity

- Friends often rely on a couple of tunes (Sydney Carter's "George Fox", the Shaker hymn "How can I keep from singing") and there could also be value in developing contemporary material. Matthew Lykos, SANTRM agreed to contribute to the soundtrack. Meetings with Wies's neighbour Pam led to her composing a soundtrack for the videos, and music for a song, along with lyrics by Adrian.

3. Focus of the videos

In our weekly meetings, discussions have focused partly on 'what is our proposition', that is our overarching message, the theme that flows through each video, and how do we best represent this? We recognise it would not need to be a chronological representation, partly because of the lack of visual resources, and partly because the history of our peace engagement in Australia has been periodic rather than consistently strong in practice, however unwavering we have been in our belief.

That lack of material has been a challenge to developing a coherent narrative. Rather than telling a wide sweep of history (that does not show itself in any of the materials we have yet uncovered) focusing on particular Friends, or 'peace points of history', makes for a more coherent story. Yet even when we find a remarkable individual – say Margaret Thorp (Watts), the lack of video material either suggests we employ a time-consuming artistic approach, or that we move on to another story.

Filmmakers often have multiple projects, and now we know why. After pursuing the Margaret Thorp strand, for example, the paucity of materials we could actually work with has made us put it on the back-burner. Another story, originally a presentation powerpoint with well written narrative, may take the inside running, while we wait on the Friend in question to send us the material. Our interviews with Jo Vallentine may have provided a stand-alone subject and story framing, as a hoped for visit by Jason McLeod was thwarted by covid lockdown: then we wondered should we tell the Quaker story through one person, who is a frontline peace activist, or follow our preference to tell it more holistically, recognising the role of the Meeting? In short, video-making is an 'emergent process' in which one possibility is foregrounded, only to then be stalled, so another takes its place.

We must consider: how can the 'proposition' be illustrated with a compelling narrative, good visuals, engaging voice-over, with theme and incidental music, as well as our Quaker processes of discernment, seeking unity, and prophetic witness?

We looked for major milestones and iconic moments when Quakers worked pro-actively for peace in Australia, and these were difficult to identify. Quakers often joined other organisations and strengthened their causes or purpose.

We realise the diverse storytelling of Quaker and Peace in Australia and our peacemaking can be captured in many historical moments, including:

- the preparations for and prevention of militarism and war or when war has broken out, to work for cessation of war.
- human rights and social justice causes without actively working in anti-militarism, prevention of and opposing war
- community, education and social cohesion work, environmental work, front line social services
- front line relief work

It is known what Quakers “did”, yet gathering visual materials for the videos, apart from the recently recorded interviews, has been difficult, and it has been time consuming to find or develop visuals or footage to demonstrate this.

The audio recordings by David Purnell of the *Dove talk* radio programs were listen to, as well as the audio recordings by Margaret Watts speaking her diaries. Friends were contacted to clarify their involvement in activism, social justice work, peace work and clarifying the availability of resources they might have. Friends have provided lists of ideas, names and events.

Various topics have been explored, including:

- Quakers’ relationship with First Nations, from Sydney Parkinson, Backhouse and Walker, to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. It seems there is little evidence that Quakers were purposely involved in the rights of First Nations peoples between the initial sightings and subsequent drawings by Sydney Parkinson, then the peregrinations of Backhouse and Walker in the 1830s, until supporting Aboriginal rights in the 1960s and onwards;
- peace activism, using Jo Vallentine as the anchor point;
- the diversity of Quakers working for peace and peace activism, incorporating the 1660 Peace Testimony;
- WW1 Banners, developed by Quakers in Sydney, including action against the Defense Act 1909, focus on the stance taken against high school cadets, WW1 conscription, conscientious objectors etc, in WW1, WW2, Vietnam war;
- *Kindertransport* power point presentation by Alan Clayton;
- A “peace sampler”, vignettes based on the Testimonies.

We commissioned a volunteer professional composer, Pam, to write music for the soundtrack, and Adrian has written lyrics, for what might be used as a resource for that soundtrack. Matthew Lykos, South Australian Friend, has offered to contribute musically.

4) What we have learnt:

- Strong support for the video project is expressed by Friends around Australia
- Video-making is an intensely collaborative exercise. To that extent, it may be well suited to a group of Friends working together. However, there is a scarcity of Friends with sufficient videography skills stepping forward, or with time to help facilitate learning those skills. So it has rested with us three.

- We have sought to engage correspondents who can champion the project within their own Meeting. Sometimes there will be a helpful friend to organise a meeting, but the level of engagement a video takes will be much higher. In a sense, the skill level of the exercise causes hesitancy. There will be a need to champion the project ourselves, and take its potential to meetings more directly, owning the burden of effort
- Subsequent to our gaining the grant from the Peace and Social Justice Fund, we learned through the Secretary's newsletter that the IT Committee has paid a professional videographer to make QuakerSpeak videos. We have been in contact with George Underwood. We have learned that he, like us, has been hampered by travel restrictions and that attempts at "remote" interviews are limited in their scope. Again, finding a voluntary videography with all of the requirements has not proved easy.
- We have learned a lot about the history of Quakers in Australia and involvement in social justice and peace campaigns and environmental campaigns – and gaps in the attention Quakers in Australia have given to the peace testimony, particularly in the 19th century. We have also learned here were a number of activist "friends of Friends" e.g. Olive Pink in Alice Springs, Marie Byles and Dot Butler in Sydney.
- The choice of video subjects is reliant on story strength, availability of video resources to support it, local videography and audio skills. This makes it sensible to work with several stories at once – an emergent process.
- Making videos requires attention to detail: a good set up with lighting, sound recording, engaging speech pattern of the interviewee, the physical environment/ background of the interviewee
- We may have a spinoff – like a Quaker hymn or song – that comes from working with musicians.
- We have had concerns about managing Friends' and our own expectations about the quality of the video. Ultimately, this has to be high, if we are to match community expectations. There is much to learn. We want to affirm that our preliminary objective is to work on a *pilot* video or videos which is both a proof of concept of video-making from within Meetings, as well as a development exercise to help us learn and share our learning with others, about the art and value of video-making. Once we have reached this level, we believe it will become easier to refine the kind of video we want to take to Meetings to help establish educational and outreach opportunities that will build Quaker values and community.
- Once making these videos, we will need to put a great deal of effort into championing them within the meeting, providing study materials and suggest frameworks, if not work closely with local correspondents.
- Not always easy to elicit from Friends that in the midst of doing a lot of good work, there is the value of the peace testimony

5). Where to from here

We are continuing to develop the narrative for two pilot videos, arranging the visuals, the voice-over and including the soundtrack. The first is working with the story of right relationships with

Indigenous people, starting with Sydney Parkinson. The second is with Jo Vallentine. The plan is to have the video ready for the AGM on 15 January 2022. It may be a third video, Australian Quakers and *Kindertransport*, might be the easiest of all – if these resources can be made available to us, it could prove to be the easiest project of them all.

Report by Wies Schuiringa, Adrian Glamorgan and Elizabeth PO'

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