

Quaker ^{Tasmanian} Newsletter

January 2025

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Photo by Jethro: JanYM25 Gallery

The final picture, 'Invisible Things' came from a search to photograph the invisible. I searched high and low and tried capturing love, and vacant space but nothing seemed to capture what I was after. Then I looked to the heavens and saw birds soaring on invisible wind currents and managed to snap this picture. It reminds me that forces beyond our senses are often at work in the world around us – and if we stop and look we may be able to get a sense of them through the way they interact with the world.

Tasmanian Quaker Newsletter
Tasmania Regional Meeting
The Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Australia

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The image adopted as the logo for Quakers in Australia represents the Aurora Australis, a natural phenomenon of the southern hemisphere, associated with Antarctica, a fragile and magnificent part of the planet. The Aurora Australis is considered an appropriate logo because of its association with:

• pure light, the centrality of the Light for Quakers

- beauty, a quality many associate with God or the Spirit within
- nature, a permanent reminder of everyone's responsibility to care for the world
- the colour blue, used by the UN
- the ephemeral and intangible, a reminder that language is inadequate to describe God, the truth or the Spirit within.

The three wise men and twelfth night

TRADITIONALLY THE Christmas season ends with Twelfth Night or Epiphany or January 6th in the Western or Gregorian calendar. So who were the three wise men? The story only appears in the Gospel of Matthew, and Biblical scholars have argued that this is because Matthew (and we don't know who he was) was a Jew who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and had to prove this to other Jews. Matthew ties the visit in with the Old Testament prophecy that "kings would come and worship him", but the original text refers to them as Magi (later translated as wise men) from the East. The kings came later along with their names – and even these vary in different Christian traditions, as do the numbers – three being assumed as they presented three gifts.

So where did they come from and who were they? The most common tradition is that they were astrologers from Persia and the Zoroastrian faith where star gazing was a science. As for the star, maybe it was Halley's comet or a rare confluence of three planets, both on the record in the decade before the birth – now accepted as somewhere around 6 BCE, given that Herod died in 4 BCE so Luke's chronology is a bit out of kilter.

The names are intriguing as again they vary in different traditions, remembering that Christianity

took a number of different forms in Asia while it was being persecuted in the Roman Empire before Constantine adopted the faith in 313 CE. The gospel of Thomas refers to Caspar but the other names do not appear till the eighth century, and in various Eastern churches – Syrian, Armenian and Ethiopian – the numbers vary too, up to twelve. The same goes for the colour of their skin.

Then there are the gifts – gold for a king, frankincense as a valuable perfume and myrrh used in burial rituals. So what happened to them? The Bible doesn't mention this, but one legend is that the gold was stolen by the thieves who were crucified with Jesus on Golgotha.

But the story I always enjoyed is that of Artaban, the fourth wise man, and his precious gift of a pearl. He missed the other three as he was helping someone in need, then spent years trying to find the Christ child. During this time, he gives away his precious stones to help others in need then eventually arrives at Golgotha where he gives the pearl in exchange for the ransom of a slave girl. As he is dying, supposedly from a stone hitting him on the head after the earthquake, he hears Jesus saying that he has found him through this act of charity.

Peter D. Jones



Photo: Sue Headley

S.O.S. 1995 – Leonard Cohen

TO SAY that Christmas Time is a stressful time for many, is a great understatement. It is not only Religious Communities which practise excommunication, disfellowshipping and the ban, some families do the same thing. I was thinking about this in my own family and came across the following from Cohen's book of poetry and prose poems *Book of Longing*.



The full poem can be accessed via this link: <https://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/SOS.html>

... So I say it quickly:
Whoever is in your life,
those who harm you,
those who help you;
those whom you know
and those whom you do not know –
let them off the hook,
help them off the hook,
Recognize the hook.
You are listening to Radio resistance.

Now here is an excerpt from Cohen's prose poem 'Moving into a Period'. I cannot find the full piece on line anywhere but Maria Popova in 'The Marginalian' gives an excellent introduction to this extract:

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2024/07/18/leonard-cohen-anger-resistance/>

We are moving into a period of bewilderment, a curious moment in which people find light in the midst of despair, and vertigo at the summit of their hopes. It is a religious moment also, and here is the danger. People will want to obey the voice of Authority, and many strange constructs of just what Authority is will arise in every mind. The family will appear again as the Foundation, much honoured, much praised, but those of us who have been pierced by other possibilities, we will merely go through the motions, albeit the motions of love. The public yearning for Order will invite stubborn uncompromising persons to impose it. The sadness of the zoo will fall upon society.

*Steve Louis Smith
Launceston Worshipping Group*

Reflections of January 25 YM: Sally O'Wheel

I WENT to the January 25 AYM. As I had other business to do in Victoria, I went to the Melbourne Hub. This is my story, not an official epistle, just the meanderings of a travelling Tasmanian Friend.

Being on a No Flight Challenge for '25, I went by the Spirit, on a day sailing without the car. I had a cabin which, while expensive, (\$250 extra for a porthole cabin), was worth it because I arrived well rested. No more roughing it, stowing away and that kind of youthful caper! Disembarking at 7.35pm there was no public transport to Geelong Station. Apparently North Geelong Station is the closest but it is difficult to walk to as you have to cross the tracks multiple times. I caught a taxi which was \$20. I give these details for other Friends who may choose this way to get across Bass Strait. It was good to sort out my MYKI card at Geelong Station and find my way up the lift and across the bridge to the other platform. Trains go between Geelong and Southern Cross Station every 30 minutes and you can choose a "Quiet carriage". It was half past 10 before I arrived in Brunswick and was met by my sister at Jewell Station. I was glad I'd had that restful sea journey.

There was nothing going on at the Melbourne Pod on Thursday, but I zoomed into a torturous bureaucratic meeting on the topic of members and attenders being registered for Yearly Meetings. More interesting was the Threshing Meeting about the timing of future Yearly Meetings. This became one of the most important topics of this Yearly Meeting. I had not been to a "Threshing Meeting" before and thought it was useful, allowing all of us to speak our thoughts without any expectation that unity would be reached.

Next day, Friday, I was one of the first to arrive at the Melbourne Quaker Centre, welcomed by Anne Brown, and soon joined by Maxine Cooper and others during the day. Anne Brown's granddaughter, Sophie, was making herself useful in setting up the space both physically and electronically. A few of us had a pleasant morning chatting. Tessa Spratt arrived with an embroidery frame, in pieces, which we eventually assembled, with the help of Sophie and a photo of what it should look like. We then attached a new embroidery panel onto the frame. This is one for the Victorians to stitch, 'Australia Yearly Meeting 2020', which depicts our first Zoom AYM during COVID. I spent my time stitching this during the rest of the time. Maxine Cooper spoke of her desire to design a panel celebrating the new Victorian

Quaker Centre – which is indeed worth celebrating. I didn't stay for the afternoon session because I had to be the tech host for the evening session so I went out for lunch with a mate and got back to my sister's place in good time to set up my laptop for that.

The Friday evening session was the UK visiting speakers, talking about laying down the Meeting For Suffering. Such a curious name. It is the oldest UK committee and had been set up to look after people during the time of persecution in the 17th Century. The session has been recorded – what a drama! – and is available on the Australian Quaker YouTube channel. I had volunteered to host this session because the time suited me. In retrospect, I recall that Gerry Fahey had tried to talk me out of hosting this session, and I now realise that was because it was a highlight of the AYM and somewhat complicated and perhaps my IT skills were not up to it. However, all was well. He did well to trust me.

Saturday. My #19 tram arrives at the Queen Victoria Market and how thrilling was it for a northwest Tasmanian Friend to walk through the market, choosing cheeses, pickles and cake to bring to the Shared Lunch.

We held a Meeting for Worship, all ages, although at the Melbourne Hub most of us were over 70. Not all of us.

After a splendid shared lunch, the first session in the afternoon was Sharing Our Stories which was where we got to hear the RM reports. It was fun to be in a hub and be able to share laughs, raise our eyebrows, groan and so on. But on the down side, you couldn't go to another page or scroll through the participants and see who was there. Our hub congratulated Jo Jordan who gave a succinct report from SANTRM. I was proud my berries got a mention!

Four of us went out for dinner at the local Vietnamese: Maxine, Anne, Anna Wilkinson and me. Cheap and delicious and a great opportunity to deepen my friendship with these women.

Sunday morning, another stroll through the markets! I arrived at 11 o'clock. We were downstairs with Bruce Henry and Sieneke Martin, because the regular Meeting for Worship started upstairs at 10.30am. That session was about the calendar. I had something to contribute which was that on that day, the 19th of January, 1832, the very first Meeting for Worship in the Southern Hemisphere was held in Hobart. (I was wrong! When I got home I checked

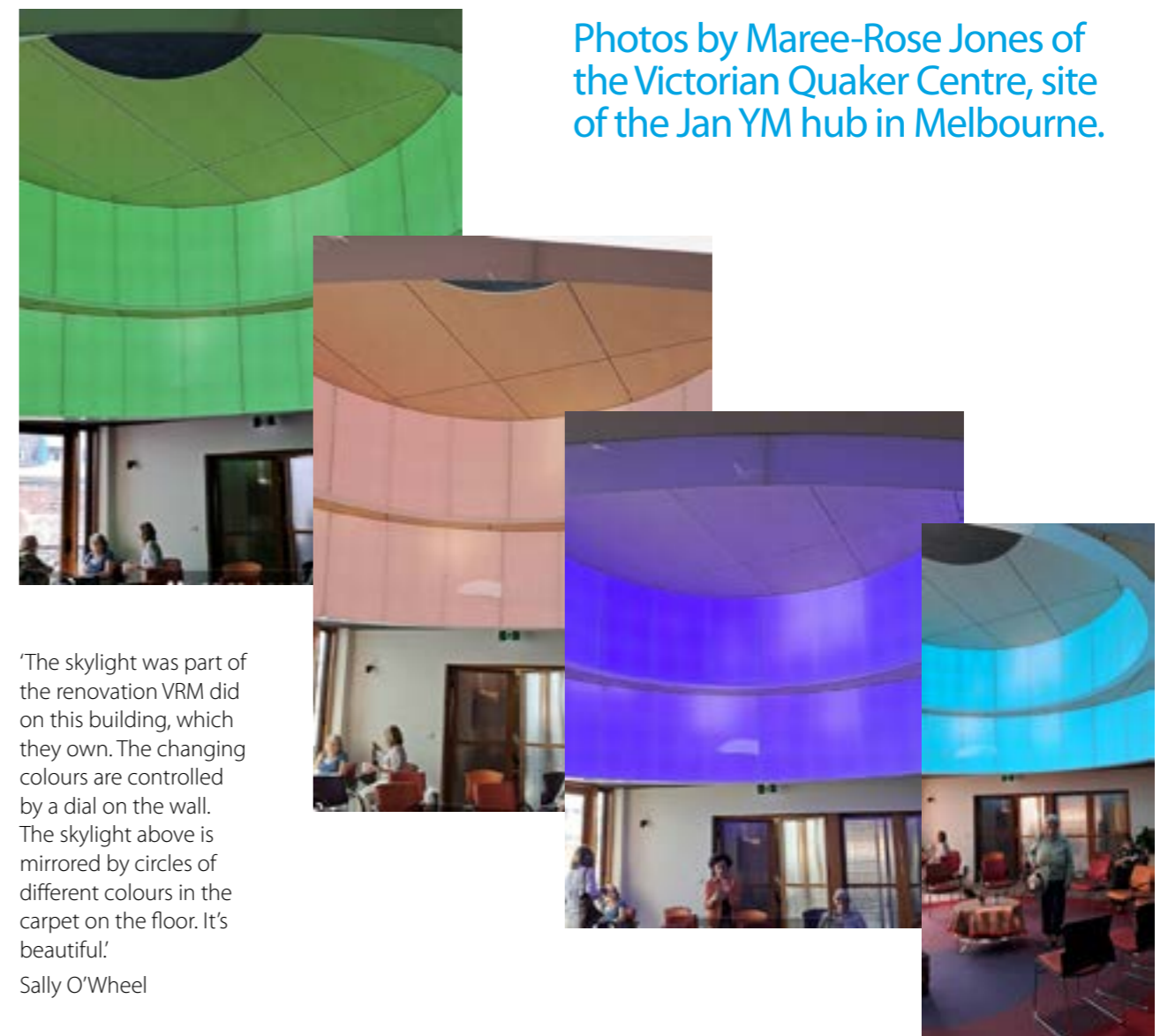
my *Life and Labours of George Washington Walker*. Backhouse and Walker were still at sea on that date!) Lots of people shared lots of dates and I hope all those dates can go onto the calendar so they are easy to find.

After lunch the session was advertised as "Open Mike" but it wasn't an open mike because only people who had prearranged to share were able to. Perhaps I missed the notice about doing that. I wanted to give a short FIS report, about the Meeting for Stitching in Mildura, the exhibition in August in Wagga Wagga and at the Sydney Embroiderers' Guild in Sydney in September.

Then we had to rush through the business sessions. In particular the thorny issue of when to hold Yearly Meeting. As far as I could tell, every

one in my hub was in unity that children and Y/young Friends should be a priority and in-person meetings should be held in January, starting as soon as possible. That is the only time all the schools and universities are on holiday. We need to use air-conditioned premises, and Friends who are unable to come due to concerns about the heat, should zoom in, rather than hoping that our Y/young Friends will do the zooming. However, nothing is quickly decided in the Religious Society of Friends and thus the issue was resolved by asking the Nominations Committee to create a committee. Oh dear.

That was rather a less-than-spiritual end to the Meeting. But there, it was over, too fast. I note that I am longing for a week-long Summer Yearly Meeting. This was as good as I could get.



'The skylight was part of the renovation VRM did on this building, which they own. The changing colours are controlled by a dial on the wall. The skylight above is mirrored by circles of different colours in the carpet on the floor. It's beautiful.'

Sally O'Wheel

I also had the opportunity to worship with Friends at Lancaster where the Meeting House is next to Lancaster Castle, which doubled up as a prison till recently. This is where George Fox was imprisoned and he writes about it in his *Journal* (1664–65). He got himself into trouble when refusing to remove his hat before the judge and then refusing to swear an oath. He had an interesting comment while in jail about a fear of the Turks (Muslims) overspreading Christendom, almost a foretaste of today’s Islamophobia, but added that nothing happened as everyone got distracted by the war with the Dutch, then the Plague and the Great Fire of London. I wasn’t so sure about his conviction that “the Lord’s power turned against the Turk”. When he was released from Lancaster Castle, and very weak, the authorities put him on a horse to take him away but Under Gaoler William Hunter

was nasty towards him in his weak condition – Fox’s comment was “the Lord cut him off soon after”. I wasn’t so sure about that either.

Swarthmoor Hall became a home for George, though much of his remaining years were spent travelling till his death in London in 1691, but the Meeting House is just down the road from Swarthmoor Hall on land that George acquired – sadly Margaret Fell’s only son (by Judge Fell) didn’t approve of Friends and as he inherited her property, they needed somewhere else to worship. Her eight daughters were more supportive but they didn’t get the property. Margaret herself lived to a ripe old age and is buried nearby in the local Friends graveyard though unmarked, having survived her husband by another eleven years.

Peter D. Jones

Puréed zucchini soup with curry

By Martha Rose Shulman

This recipe is shared by courtesy of the *New York Times*. Read it [here](#).



No other land: A response

WHEN I was 20, in 1976, I spent two months on an Israeli kibbutz located on the West Bank border. I had read about kibbutzim in the alternative magazine *Grass Roots* and was very interested in the concept of intentional socialist communities. I enjoyed my stay on the kibbutz. We volunteers were taken on trips, including to Massada, where we climbed the “isolated rock plateau” and heard the story of the Romans building a ramp up the side of the rock to kill hundreds of Jews who had retreated to the top of the plateau, only to find that they had all committed suicide prior to their arrival (this narrative is now questioned). Soldiers with machine guns were numerous in the Tel Aviv airport, Israeli fighter jets regularly broke the sound barrier over the kibbutz, and I and two fellow volunteers were attacked by Palestinians when we wandered away from the kibbutz. I left Israel thinking that Jews had been driven out of Israel by the Romans, and surrounding Arab countries were determined to “drive all Israelis into the sea”.

I had read a little about the history of the Jews. I was horrified by the Holocaust and didn’t question the declaration of the state of Israel after WWII. I wish I had read more widely, which I’m only starting to do now. I am very ashamed to say that until recently I had very little knowledge or understanding of the history and situation of Palestinians (particularly pertinent for me are *Advices and Queries* 33–37). The IDF destruction of people and place in Gaza has shaken me out of my ignorance and complacency. No degree of religious or historical claim to geographical territory can excuse the cruel and often illegal harassment that Palestinians have endured and continue to endure, and the “plausible” genocide conducted on the Gazan population in the past 15 months.

“*No Other Land* is a 2024 documentary film ... made by a Palestinian-Israeli collective of four activists in what they describe as an act of resistance on the path to justice during the ongoing conflict in the region” ([Wikipedia](#)). I saw this film recently and left feeling more enlightened about, but also more disturbed than ever by, the curated narrative of history and politics that is provided by mainstream politicians and media in Australia.

Over a period of four years, Basel, a young Palestinian activist, and, Yuval, a young Israeli journalist, documented the destruction of Palestinian



By Berlinale, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=76180863>

houses and schools – and worse atrocities – undertaken by the IDF in the West Bank, as Palestinian land is claimed for an IDF military firing zone. This is confronting stuff, and this happened before the Gazan disaster. I have been surprised in this film, and in all media interviews of Palestinians in Gaza that I have seen, that Palestinians do not express extreme anger or promote violence in response to their treatment.

I think everyone should see this film¹, even if you are well versed in Palestinian history. Not only does it provide unquestionable documentation of the deplorable treatment of these Palestinians, but it also shows the commitment of Basel and Yuval to work together for justice, despite their differences, which is encouraging, and provides some hope that peace is achievable and sustainable.

Sue Headley

¹ No longer at the State Cinema, but [available online](#) and I think it will appear on SBS some time..

Salvation Army Christmas Gift Drive

A HUGE thank you to Friends who had donated to The Salvos Gift Drive.

The volunteers were amazed by the collection the Quaker meeting had put together. We managed to donate four boxes of gifts for children of all ages. This included 15 gift vouchers worth over \$500 in total. The volunteers said they were also very happy to accept gift for adults as these could go to mums in need.

My three-year-old daughter managed to understand that “some people don’t have any money to buy presents to give at Christmas time”. I was able to explain that we had helped by giving.

I aim to run the Xmas drive again this year.

In Friendship,

Adele Raward

