

Quaker

Tasmanian
Newsletter

October 2024

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Tasmanian Quaker Newsletter

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

View from Poatina during Meeting
for Learning retreat, October 2024.
See p.4. Photo: Sally O'Wheel

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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.

Know one another – Jan Blakeney

Queen of the Hippies: Jan Blakeney

JAN ENGLISH was born in Los Angeles in 1946. Her father was 52 when she was born, 20 years older than her mother. He was an Irish immigrant who had arrived in 1911, aged 16, with \$10 in his pocket, gaining his US citizenship by enlisting in the US army in WWI. When Jan was eight, he died. Her mother moved to the coast with Jan and her older brother. A few years later, Jan's mother married again, her third marriage. Jan was 11.

She attended South Torrance High School, four years after Steve Blakeney had been a student there. She wanted to become a vet, but once she started higher education she realised that her chemistry wasn't good enough so she changed majors to Art History at University of California, Santa Barbara instead.

In 1963 she had met Steve and they married in 1966. He had studied industrial arts and education and was able to support them with his teaching while Jan finished her Art History degree. Over two summers they had a wonderful job making photographic slides and text for the use of university lecturers in European art and architecture. In 1968



Jan and Steve at Santa Barbara in 1968

and 1969, they travelled to Europe and Steve took photos while Jan wrote the text. All expenses paid.

Nineteen-sixties California must have been an exciting place to be young. They were anti-war but a shy couple, they didn't get involved in anti-war

demonstrations; however, found other opportunities to show they felt the world needed a different path. They did become passionate about organic gardening and looked for a place to build a life where they could incorporate that lifestyle. Not Santa Barbara and not the USA. They heard about teacher exchange programs in Australia, where the Australian government paid your fares. Their parents didn't like it, but she and Steve packed their bags for Sydney where they knew some 'folks' – friends of friends.

These friends put them up while they found their feet, and bought a Kombi which Steve fitted out as a camper van. They set off to explore Australia, heading to the cooler south. Steve was offered teaching work in Swan Hill, Victoria. He was astounded by the lack of equipment in the woodwork department compared to California.

From Swan Hill they made their way to Whyalla, South Australia. Steve got work at the Whyalla High school. Whyalla was a town of immigrants so they fitted in well. They explored the desert, driving in the Kombi to Alice Springs over dirt roads. In Jan's words: 'there were no roads.' That adventure completely wrecked the suspension on the Kombi.

Meanwhile Jan had taken out a subscription to the Hobart *Mercury*, having an idea that Tasmania might be the place to provide the organic gardening opportunity. Sure enough, she spotted a three-line advertisement for a residential caretaker for the Deloraine Folk Museum. They got the job in 1971.

The folk museum was set up in an 1865 twelve-room inn and coaching house with accommodation in an extension out the back. Jan hurried to bone up on local history and Steve got work at Deloraine High. They settled into five years of life at the folk museum.

In 1975 Jan and Steve relinquished their US citizenship and became Australian citizens. At that time it wasn't possible to be dual citizens. 'We are citizens of the world, but when you live in a place, you want to be part of the community,' she explained.

In this time, Deloraine was a very divided community. The old guard – conservative Tasmanian country people – were challenged by the scores of young hippies from the mainland, long-haired artists and radicals in scruffy clothes, wanting to buy land, save the forests and create organic gardens.

While living at the folk museum they bought land in Weetah, just out of Deloraine, and, after their tenure at the museum in 1977, built an A-frame house to Steve's design. Their organic garden dream became reality. At the same time Jan and another woman started a health food business in Deloraine.

As a respectable business woman Jan was elected to the Deloraine Council. She saw this as a way to be a voice for the alternative community, to bridge the gap between the newcomers and the old timers. She was the first and only woman to be elected to then Deloraine Council and was dubbed 'Queen of the Hippies'. She spoke up for Deloraine House, for the Craft Fair, and worked with service organisations to clean up the Meander River. The river banks were lined by out-of-



China Bicycle Tour Souvenirs 1985

control blackberries. Local service clubs cleared the blackberries and, under Jan's chairmanship of the Council's Parks Committee, advanced trees were planted, making the beautiful park it is today.

Jan loved her health food shop business, her window to the community. Jenny Seaton and I



Jan and Steve as ACF Legacy Supporters

"While it is good to invest capital on Earth's account now, it is better in the long-term to multiply that capital through ongoing environmental advocacy. ACF is one of the strongest organisations working to this end and should be number one on anyone's 'bucket list'."

Jan and Steve Blakeney
ACF Legacy Leaders

both shopped there. All our friends did. In 1985 Steve gave up his teaching job and started his own furniture design and manufacturing business, Gray Owl Timber Products. In 1985, Jan and Steve also made a bicycle tour of southern China with a small group of Australians that included former ABC journalist Andrew Potter. Jan describes this trip as 'the most incredible experience ever'. It was after Jan retired from the shop in 2007 that she followed her passion for family history. She discovered a Quaker line in her mother's family, the Peacocks of North Carolina. It made her curious. Who were these Quakers? What did they believe? She did her research. The Peacocks were connected to the Coffins, involved in the Underground Railway, and connections by marriage to John Woolman.

Steve and Jan attended their first Meeting for Worship in Devonport. They came there because they knew me, from our joint years living in Deloraine. It was a 'Homecoming'.

Jan said, although she wasn't born Quaker, she was born to be a Quaker. Steve feels the same. Now both are members of TRM, Jan serves on the Finance Committee and is one of two representatives to the newly established Earthcare Witness Action Committee of AYM. They attend Friends Online Recognised Meeting on Sundays afternoons.

Jan was interviewed by Sally O'Wheel.

Editorial

THIS IS a short newsletter, but it contains contributions from many Tasmanian F/friends. This month, the Meeting for Learning retreat, and concurrent TRM silent retreat, held in Poatina, encouraged participants to put pen to paper and

News of Friends

MAGGI STORR recently had dental surgery and has recovered very rapidly and well and reports that she is 'back in the swing of life'.

GILL FITZGERALD has been awarded an Honorary Life Membership of the Hobart Walking Club.

HWC notes that 'Gill is well known to members as a friendly, competent, and supportive leader, administrator, and coordinator. She joined the Club in July 1976 and has had 49 years of continuous membership.

'Brendon Bowes, who nominated Gill for the award at the meeting, told members that she exemplifies the personal qualities and outstanding achievements deserving for Honorary Life Membership. Her long and admirable contributions to the Club and to Tasmanian bushwalking had been exemplary, and they stand out as justifications for this high recognition. Her past achievements include:

document their responses to their experiences. We hope you also enjoy the second in our 'Travelling in the Spirit' pieces and the insight into the life of Jan Blakeney.

Sue Headley and Sally O'Wheel

- a past member of the Club's Executive Committee and served for five years (2008–2013);
- a current member of the Club's *The Tasmanian Tramp* subcommittee and a member for the past six years;
- a member of the Club's Social Committee for 15 years;
- in 2016 received the Club's Long and Significant Service Award.

'She is the 37th recipient of the Honorary Life Membership award that has been made since 1939.

'Gill will receive her award at the Club Annual Dinner and Awards night on 23 November.'

Gill said:

I've found walking leads to a greater appreciation of the environment, either alone, or in the company of like-minded people. It is good for mental and physical well being, and can be a form of meditation. That is why it is an important part of my life.

Update on that photo

MARY POLLARD writes:

About the 1962 photo – I have decided now that the white-haired woman between Bill Oats and Dorothy Gregory is Gwen Catchpool from the UK. She and her husband Corder Catchpool (who died years before this photo) were very well known Quakers. Their son and his family lived near our family in Sydney and we had contact with them. Later in 1962 I travelled to the UK by boat with two friends and by Christmas we were settled in the top flat of Gwen's house in Hampstead for the winter. It turned out to be one of the coldest winters for years. I returned to Australia in late 1965 after many adventures.

A long story to fill in a gap in the photo, best wishes, Mary P



Travelling in the spirit

Cathedrals and Quiet Corners: Reflections from the Balkans – David O'Halloran

AS A Quaker, my worship centres on simplicity, quiet reflection, and a rejection of outward display. This contrasts with the ornate, grand places of worship I encountered during my travels in the Balkans and beyond. While I deeply respect the craftsmanship and historical significance of these structures, they offer a different kind of spiritual experience compared to the humble, unadorned Quaker meeting houses where the focus is on the spiritual connection rather than the architecture or decoration.

One exception that resonated with me is the Church of St. Sophia in Sofia, Bulgaria. Built in the 6th century, its plain brick walls and minimalist design reflect the early Christian vision of worship, where simplicity was intentional, helping to maintain focus on the message of faith. It's a reminder of a time when early Christianity embraced simplicity before evolving into more elaborate forms of worship. The space feels almost free from distraction, where the divine feels close, not lost in the grandeur.

In contrast, the Rila Monastery, high in the Bulgarian mountains, captivates with its colourful frescoes and intricate woodwork, serving as a powerful symbol of Orthodoxy and national pride. While its beauty is undeniable, I personally find a stronger spiritual connection in simpler spaces. Similarly, Serbia's Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade is an impressive sight, with its gold-plated mosaics and towering domes. It inspires awe, but for me, that grandeur feels more connected to national identity than personal worship.



By Ggia - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57758153>

The churches in Vienna are equally awe-inspiring. From the Gothic spires of St. Stephen's Cathedral to the Baroque extravagance of Karlskirche, these buildings are designed to overwhelm the senses. Many find deep spiritual meaning in such settings, but for me, they can create a sense of distance, making the divine feel more out of reach.

In contrast, the quiet simplicity of a Quaker meeting house fosters a direct, intimate connection with the divine. No distractions, no pomp – just stillness. In a world full of noise, I find that unadorned spaces offer a unique opportunity for reflection and connection. It's in that stillness, free from spectacle, where I feel closest to the divine – an experience that is deeply personal and different from what larger, more ornate churches may offer others.

Here is a link to more Wikimedia pictures of St Sophia (not allowed to take photos inside) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Interior_of_Saint_Sophia_Church,_Sofia (the plaster on the walls is where the building has been reconstructed).



By Ggia - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57758147>

Meeting for Learning at Poatina in October

Some reflections on the first retreat of Meeting for Learning, which was held at Poatina, in parallel with a week-long TRM silent retreat.

I WENT to Meeting for Learning at Poatina.

One of the activities was Lectio Divina. There are three parts to it:

- you read a text and stop when you come to something that stands out for you
- you repeat those words during Worship
- a prayer emerges.

I read the words of Isaac Pennington and these are the words that stopped me:

To feel God beginning the work
and to wait on God for his carrying it on.

This is my prayer

The seed of my soul.

My shy platypus soul.

May I notice you surfacing.

You begin the work

I note it.

I feel it.

May I wait patiently

by the water.

Wait for you to

continue the work

onwards.

May I not abandon the work
when you dive under the
dark ripples.

May I wait
wait by the edge
until you rise again
in another part of the lake
to carry on your work.

Your work, God
that I wait to carry on.

I wait on you
to carry it on.

Sally O'Wheel

MEETING FOR learning, sounded interesting but could I be bothered? It was suggested it would be good for me ... good implying 'ready' or I could benefit by it? Along I went, not knowing what I would 'learn'. I was challenged, anxious, fearful, emotional, teary, but as the days passed, a sense of calmness, intimacy, passion, support, courage, unconditional love and peace, which remained with me for days on my return to the 'real' world. On reflection, it was not to be feared but embraced with enthusiasm.

Ali Cummings



Left to right : Fiona Gardner, Kellie Andrews, Glenn Barnes, Suellen O'Brien, Jen Newton, Sharon Matthews, Ali Cummings, Catherine Heywood, Sally O'Wheel, Drew Thomas, Jenny Spinks, Melanie Baulch.

Reflections on Silent Retreat at Poatina in October

POATINA

Silent Retreat at Poatina with Drew Lawson, our Spiritual Director

Inspired planning; warm hospitality; dramatic landscape

Time apart from the world; to look within; remember the journey

Savour the joys; feel the Love; explore new openings; seek the Light

So much gratitude; so many precious gifts ...

Rosemary Epps

MOUNTAIN AURORA

Enormous escarpment, boulders, wilderness.

Massive mountains, granite rocks,

Sacred space, timelessness.

Blood red Aurora, heart beat

Unforgettable.

Whispering, golden dark lime

Green rare rosellas, walking.

Unexpected vision.

Crimson Aurora, Earth's inner flame,

Precious, dream like.

Hidden Aurora Australis, visible seeping over

Giant stones, crags, towering cliffs,

Wisdom unfolding.

Southern Lights transforming darkness.

Swirling flurries, falling snowflakes,

Tiniest white crystals.

Scarlet Aurora shedding webs of healing,

Loves' softness, like a silk scarf, awakening

Embracing, enfolding each of us.

Massive mountains, granite rocks.

Marion Ramsay

IN EARLY October, a few of us joined the Quaker Silent Retreat held at Poatina alongside the main event of 'Meeting For Learning'.

We came from the mainland and Tasmania, and were an inclusive faith group. It is a two to three hour drive from Hobart.

Silence is a central understanding for the Society of Friends and this was an opportunity to explore the spiritual meaning of that experience.

Poatina was a very good choice for these meetings. It is a faith community, in a once-hydro town, facilitated by Fusion organisation.

The pace and sense of rest in every aspect of the now tiny town supported an ability to reflect.

The gentle nurturing presented through simple

food in a dining room looking over the Great Western Tiers sustained stepping back from everyday routine for participants. I had wondered about a prolonged silence – being naturally chatty and having only participated in short retreats through my decades as a Friend. This retreat guided by Drew Lawson set us on our own independent paths.

I was fortunate to walk in the stunning bush immediately surrounding Poatina on every afternoon except one very gusty day, each walk noticing new things in the same reserve. A highlight in the week was seeing an aurora at 4am across the huge skies. This was worth the intrusion of the outside world in researching the outlook on the dedicated Facebook group. There was a gap in cloudy skies for half an hour the night before the larger event witnessed down south. It brought awe to our house.

An unforgettable week, in a special community, I am grateful to have participated and wonder why I thought silence would be difficult; I wasn't very keen to begin connecting with the outside world. The journey home was as beautiful as the journey there.

Hilary Dawkins/Clared



View from dining room window at retreat at Poatina.
Photo: Hilary Dawkins/Clared

Aurora splendour

Many thanks to Dawn for providing these wonderful photos of the aurora australis when it was visible in Tasmania this year.



1860 Fox document online

Dawn has also contributed the following information about a George Fox document that she found in the digital collection Early English Books Online at the University of Michigan.

I HAVE come upon a very rare old Quaker document on the internet by accident that might be of interest to readers.

The original is hard to read in old English and text and I contacted the University of Michigan (Dr Paul Schaffner) who stated that the old text was copyrighted and owned by Proquest, but they can distribute in another font.

It seems the crux of the article is George Fox's message to divorce the Christian teachings from what he described as popery and unsubstantiated ritual being misused to control of people. I think this message is relevant today given complaints made by "lapsed" church goers. For those who would like to read this 1680 publication, its title is *The Protestant*

Christian-Quaker a sufferer by reliques of popery under all powers for thirty years last past who have persecuted for religion yet call the Holy Scriptures their rule, that justifieth no such practice. Author George Fox.

Library Website: University of Michigan Library Digital collections and the link that The Manager of Text Creation and Digital content and Collections has provided is: <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A40236.0001.001>. This did not work for me, but typing "George Fox Protestant Christian-Quaker Popery" in the search bar of Google produced a list of where this document is available from several sources.

Peace and joy to you, Dawn

NB. The link did work for the editors of TQN so try it first!