

# The Australian Friend

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## Fire



# Editorial

Photos of the Australian bush fires have been beamed around the world, and we are grateful to those Friends who have sent us the stories and photos of their experience of these fires. Others have found the experience goes too deep for words. How are we to respond?

The traditional Quaker response is to seek the guidance of the Spirit in silence, and we have three more articles about ministering out of the silence of Meeting for Worship. Friends are cautious about giving ministry. Peter Bennett describes how ministry which inspires some Friends can irritate others. This may lead Friends to take refuge in silence, not because it is the right path but because it is the safe path.

In the Book of Acts we hear how the Holy Spirit came upon the early followers of Jesus. They saw what looked like 'tongues of fire' and 'began to talk in other languages'. No doubt they irritated a good number of the people who heard them. We probably don't need the 'other languages', but has the time come for us to occasionally speak with 'tongues of fire'?

If we have nothing to say, we can of course let our lives speak. We hear in this issue of how Quakers responded (or failed to respond) to the Spirit in the past. We are grateful to the Jewish Museum for letting us republish an article (based on records donated by NSW Regional Meeting) about Quaker attempts to bring Jewish refugees to safety in Australia at the time of the Second World War. Quaker Service Australia urges us to contribute to the building of toilets in Cambodia – it is difficult to maintain human dignity in the absence of decent sanitation! And we hear from Quakers who manned the stall at the Mardi Gras Fair as an expression of our Testimony to Equality.

We are grateful to all those who contribute to our magazine. Please feel free to place your comments on the web site. Our committee is based in NSW, and so it is easier for us to source articles from close at hand. But we very much want to cover the whole of Australia. If there is someone in your meeting who has a story to tell, please urge them to write for us!

**THE AUSTRALIAN FRIEND EDITORIAL TEAM**



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Cover photo: Fiona McLennan

# Earth Story

FIONA MCLENNAN | CANBERRA REGIONAL MEETING



*I have had a wide variety of experience of the climate events of this last summer in the Eastern states of Australia – some of which lead me to have an understanding of why it is so important for the world to hear the story, from those who were there. Because I wasn't at first. In two distinct yet similar ways. I live in southern NSW in the Bega Valley and do not have television nor read newspapers to receive my understanding of global events.*

When the fires began in Queensland and the surrounds of Sydney I was aware – and it would be easy to claim my level of awareness was due to lack of media exposure and visual data but very clearly in hindsight – it was more than that. Predominantly my level of awareness was due to the fact it wasn't happening to me. It was a story. To be discussed and horrified about. To claim righteous indignation, for some, and to be made a political agenda. To create an intellectual construct about, all the while imagining a emotional connection that almost certainly was lacking. It was a story.

That's what media and our social systems make of the lives of people. Stories. Short stories of the most flammable – pun most certainly intended – parts that quickly move to the next topic after the intense heat of interest has died. Leaving the lives of the people in the ashes cold, dirty, shattered and alone. Watching from the charred, desolate remains of their lives – as the next, new story becomes headlines. Whether it is more common tragedy and drama – or the recent bushfires.

But this story – unlike the usual bite size chunks of global disaster and mayhem traditionally beamed into our living rooms through the box in the corner – didn't end did it? It kept going. And the smoke of the disaster became so much more than a bite sized chunk – and it began to choke humanity on a global scale. All of us were involved.

**And then it was me. It was my life.**

When my community and home was evacuated for the first time at 3am on the 31st of December – I wasn't there either.

I was 'safe', 4000 km away in WA breathing fresh air with clear view of the stars without haze. Tears begin to roll now.

Before I left for my holiday, it was suggested I pack a bag of important things that could easily be grabbed if the fires came closer to us. I didn't. Because it wasn't going to happen to me. It was still a story happening to someone else.

For the first week of 2020, the most common thing I heard was 'You must feel so lucky to not be there'. That was not what I felt at all.

In fact felt very little because my survival physiology had gone into deep functional freeze. The best description is a form of survivor guilt – which perhaps some global friends can relate to. I felt no ability to relate to those around me in WA and they showed very limited capacity to relate to my experience. I had become the story, out of context.

It was particularly surreal and isolating until I told my 11-year-old son after the first week – not wanting to cause him distress in the period of time where I was most unsure that we would have a home ... to come home to. When I finally did tell him his first words were 'We must go home and be with everyone – I feel like we are cheating'. This is the best description of my experience. From the mouths of babes.

Of course it would have been foolish to go home immediately, and various pathways were now not possible. So we stayed. And prayed. And floated with our spirits in one place and our bodies in another.

When we finally flew into Canberra, we discovered the vehicle we were meant to travel home in had been destroyed by the golf ball sized hailstones that had battered the nation's capital in the middle of summer. While it burned and burned and burned up the road. The contrast was ... ridiculous ... no words.

We arrived home a just few days before school began. Travelled over



Brown Mountain to see our valley veiled by a blanket of the thickest smoke ... that we knew was, in fact, minimal in comparison to the apocalyptic scenes from the fortnight before.

*It's okay ...  
 Didn't burn ...  
 Close still ...  
 Forecast heat ...  
 Wind ...  
 Maybe ...  
 Choking still...  
 Hyper vigilance  
 THREAT AGAIN  
 GET OUT  
 LEAVE OR DIE  
 WHAT MATTERS  
 WHAT TO TAKE  
 ANIMALS  
 GET OUT*

Our community in Tanja was beyond exhausted after the roller coaster of evacuation, return, evacuation, return. And the background noise of constant, hyper vigilant fear. Raw, hair trigger reactivity swirling in a soup of trauma no one had had a moment to stop and process.

Like those times in the ocean when you get caught in a continuous set of enormous waves – duck, hold your breath, come up in the chaos, snatch a breath, go under again. Come up and float in exhausted fear for a moment with the next set looming, potentially, on the horizon.

Gratitude that our fire had twice turned back on itself before it reached our particular spot? Yes. A guilty, confused gratitude that had to stand

beside those who had lost everything. Your home still standing in the ruins of a desecrated world is a scarred gratitude. Making you wonder if you have any real right to feel at all ... as the tsunami of grief and fear and despair dumps you over and over.

Then the first unexpected rains. Enough to create bizarre lush greenery in the smoking ruins – not enough to touch the sides of the monster fires. And still – 10 km away – ‘our’ fire creeping forward. One of so many. Contained, moving so slowly but seemingly impossible to extinguish.

It seemed nothing could stop it and we were facing that almost certainly that it would come through our community ... at this point we almost wanted it to ... rather than face weeks of repeated evacuation every time the weather took a turn. No one was bothering to unpack now.

School started, two days, closed, evacuated again. The knock on the door from the police and SES. We had not unpacked our bags from WA and everyone else had only just started to unpack from the previous two evacuations.

Yet it almost seemed the new normal as we all went to a caravan park in Tathra together – it was bizarrely almost a spirit of revelry due to the lesser intensity of threat and the growing familiarity with the process. My son and I were fortunate that this more upbeat evacuation was our first actual experience.

#### *SYSTEMS ARE DOWN*

*How to stay together?  
 Not lash and disconnect ...  
 Stay in unity the Earth has  
 demanded ...*

*The new normal in danger of  
 becoming the old ...*

*The pain ... loss ... confusion ... am I  
 allowed to feel?*

*As others kneel in broken homes ... I  
 stand in my doorway ... am I allowed  
 to feel?*

*So tired.  
 Disconnecting.  
 Collapsing.*

*And I look over at you who seemed to  
 push me in the charcoal mud ... I look  
 in your eyes ... I catch your tears ... I  
 take your hand ... hold your weary  
 heart ... light shining through the  
 cracks ... know it to be my own*

*We are not broken.  
 We are breaking through.  
 Nervous breakthrough.*

Can there be an ‘upbeat evacuation’ from bushfires? There can when you have done it enough times, that it has almost become the new normal. When you have done it enough times that there are now grades of evacuation.

After coming home the following week, we headed to Sydney for an emotional recovery workshop. Griefstricken, driving through the charred remains of the NSW coast on one day. Heading down Mt Ousley with hazard lights on in the most torrential rain I have ever experienced – the very next day. The contrasted threatening, devastating weather experiences now becoming truly, mentally destabilising.

Not just unprecedented disaster – unprecedented, completely opposite forms of disaster. One seeming to be a saviour of the other – yet wreaking its own havoc and threat. To have any sort of stable mind was becoming more and more challenging.

I could go on. This is truly a very brief overview of my personal experience.

Yet beyond my personal story ... beyond the myriad stories and experiences of those who lived the reality of the monster fires and crazy weather events this past summer – what is the story?

### **The Real Story – The Earth Story – The Collective Story**

For me – collective is the operative word. Interconnectivity.

In the days before I left WA, I spent

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



# Summer 2020 bushfires

PETER HILLERY | CANBERRA REGIONAL MEETING

*Ring, ring ..... ring, ring....*

*Who could be ringing at this early hour I thought as I stumbled towards the beast that had woken me.*

*'Hello' I mumbled into the phone.*

*'Dad – Quaama and Cobargo have been burnt out!'*

*'What!' I exclaimed.*

**W**e live in Bega, a regional town in south eastern New South Wales. Bushfires had been burning in areas around us for the last couple of months. Batemans Bay and north eastern Victoria, both about two hours drive north and south of us, had been on alert but Quaama is only about 30 kilometres north along the Princes Highway and Cobargo is a further 15 kilometres. This was serious.

Our daughter lives in Tathra, about 15 km east, which was devastated by bushfires two years ago.

'We're evacuating. Can we come to your place?' she asked.

It is New Years Eve 2019 and we start preparing for the worst bushfires Australia has ever seen. The day before our other daughter, with her husband and 2 children, left for her home near Bungendore, cutting short a beach side holiday with her sister in Tathra.

For the next six days our granddaughter, daughter and son-in-law stayed with us in Bega watching the catastrophe unfold. As the fires crept closer from the north, west and south we followed the Rural Fire Service 'Fires Near Me' webpage, the emergency broadcasts on local ABC radio, road closures on the 'Live Traffic' website, satellite hotspot images website, the local Council live streaming updates from their major Evacuation Centres and similar websites from north eastern Victoria. As the situation worsened, we monitored these sources overnight.

Two days into the new-year, I got a message from a relative near Canberra whose neighbours, a young family, were holidaying near Batemans Bay and were advised to evacuate. The Kings Highway between them and Canberra was closed and they were trying to go via Bega and the Monaro Highway through Cooma. As there was no fuel in their area, they were trying to get some in Bega. She asked if we could look after them if they were unsuccessful. They were lucky and managed to get home. Soon after, all roads north, south and west of us were cut – there was no way out of the Bega Valley.

But we were very lucky as all services (water, electricity, phone, internet, etc) were maintained – not so in most other places. Bega and Merimbula became major evacuation centres with thousands of people occupying public places like showgrounds. Hundreds of others were looked after in churches, schools, halls and private houses. Apart from burnt vegetation and soot, our biggest concern was smoke. We had at least 5-6 weeks enveloped in smoke; on two days it was so thick we had the lights on all day. Our solar cells produced only 0.03 and 0.60 kWhrs where-as normally they generate 24-25 kWhrs on a good summer day.

Our other concern was spot fires from burning embers being blown onto our place. We spent some time maintaining water in our gutters. A fire front coming into Bega would be most unlikely.

The two major supermarkets remained open throughout this crisis but most of their staff couldn't get to work, or were protecting their own property or were fighting fires with the Rural Fire Service. This resulted in the stores limiting customers to numbers they could handle. Most customers had to wait in a queue outside the store.

The information provided by local services was outstanding. The local ABC radio provided continuous updates throughout the whole crisis. The information provided by the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Services, the Police Service and Bega Valley Shire Council via its regular briefings to Evacuees and live streamed on the internet was outstanding. Our Mayor, a young woman with her own children and husband to worry about, did a magnificent job of coordinating these information sessions. The Defence Forces have also done a lot of amazing work here.

As the bushfires were brought under control, we became aware of the devastation caused. In our shire over 400 houses have been lost. This does not include other sheds / buildings, equipment, fences, livestock and native animals. We have lived in Bega for four years but know the former residents of seven houses that burnt down. Unfortunately, many people were either not insured or under insured. The Bega Valley is one of the lowest socio-economic areas in Australia and many residents took their chances with



Smoke around us at midday 31 December 2019



Dark skies at 4:30pm 4 January 2020

insurance. Many who were insured have found out that there are now much tighter regulations for buildings and their insurance cover won't cover rebuilding to these higher standards.

A hidden but large problem is for all the small businesses who were not directly affected by the bushfires. Tourism is a huge industry in this region where most small businesses make up to 70% of their annual profit during the summer holiday period. That is all gone and most have now got accounts for all the stock they pre-ordered. Many have had to lay-off

staff in a very high unemployment area and sadly many will close their doors. The devastating effect on regional and small communities will be unbelievable. I worry about their long term viability. Organisations, like Vinnies and the Salvation Army, that provide support in these circumstances are likely to be inundated.

This tragedy has been repeated up and down the east coast of Australia, around Victoria and onto South Australia as well as other areas. The rebuilding of these communities will be a task of immense proportions, unlike

anything Australia has ever seen. I pray that our leaders, local, state and federal, will rise to the occasion.

Let us not forget the fundamental cause: the change in our climate which produced the conditions that allowed this disaster to occur. My hope is that, as a community, we can recognise this, get over the finger pointing and blaming, and work together to address the real problem. I urge all Friends to work towards this achievable goal.

AF



# The Quaker Collection

*'We in our loneliness set our entire hope upon Australia'*

DR MICHELLE BOOTCOV | SYDNEY JEWISH MUSEUM CURATORIAL DEPARTMENT

In 2018 the NSW Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) entrusted a unique collection of 434 documents to the Sydney Jewish Museum. Its surprising contents referenced Quaker involvement with European refugees in the years leading up to World War II, disclosing the dire circumstances of those who appealed for safe harbour in Australia. This parcel of documents reflects a global network of altruistic intentions and influence, tempered by harsh realities and ponderous bureaucracy.

Quakers, or 'Friends' as they refer to themselves, have worked for humanitarian causes since their establishment in seventeenth century England from Christian origins. Soon after Hitler came to power in 1933, the Society of Friends in London established a committee to assist the persecuted. As violence escalated, 'non-Aryans,' conscientious objectors, opponents of Nazi ideology and other 'undesirables' lost their jobs and control of their lives. In Vienna, the Quaker's Centre was 'besieged with people', that were 'like eels caught in a trap'.

In 1938, the German Emergency Fellowship Committee (GEFC) was established in Sydney. Initially aimed at helping German 'non-Aryan Christians', they quickly expanded their remit. Their correspondence, anchored by their President and Chairperson, Camilla Wedgwood, forms the core of the Quaker Collection. At the time she was an anthropologist and Principal of the Sydney University Women's College. Dr Rudi Lemberg (a German

biochemist who migrated to Australia in 1935) was the GEFC Secretary, Allan Clunies Ross (a businessman) was Treasurer and Dr E. Sydney Morris (the NSW Director General of Health) was also on the executive committee. They were all volunteers. Wedgwood told a friend that she was Chair 'because my name is so English that no one however prejudiced could pretend that I was either a Jew or a scheming German, and I have a certain aura of respectability' (not least because she was part of the Wedgwood-Darwin dynasty, but also because she shouldered most of the burden).

## Successes and Failures

The collection encompasses a diverse cross-section of people, including stateless people making direct appeals, English and American Quakers working in Europe on their behalf, Australian governmental responses, and extraordinary ordinary-Australians offering assistance. Letters request assistance with migration, seek contacts for work, thank Camilla for her help or provide references. They also close the door on hope. Some are formal, others are infused with emotions of desperation, optimism or trepidation. Many intercede on behalf of friends, community or family members. While several display foresight and forward planning, others are pleas of last resort.

Not all are from western Europe and occasionally they exhibit cross-continental collaboration. The GEFC received a request from Jakob Tenenbaum, a Jewish engineer from

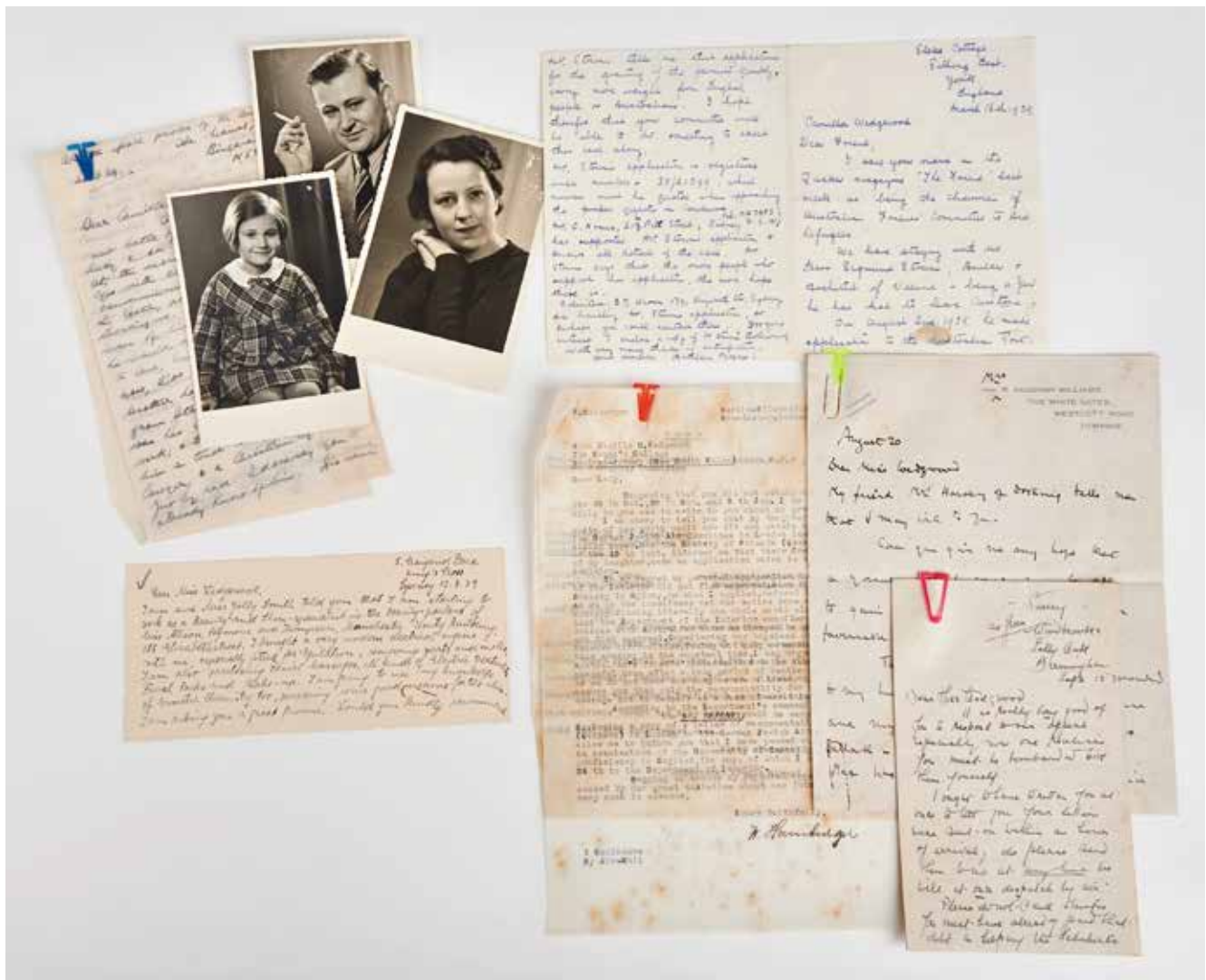
Lvov, Poland via Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, in London. Camilla's father worked tirelessly for the refugee cause, but was unable to help in this instance. Rosika Schwimmer, a prominent pacifist-feminist wrote from New York on behalf of Eugenie Meller (a preeminent leader of the Hungarian feminist and pacifist movement) and her Jewish family. Both Tenenbaum and Meller were unsuccessful. Camilla's sister Gloria Oppenheim, wrote from Rustenburg, South Africa for help with Oskar Moser, his wife Josephine, sister-in-law (Anna Hartmann) and mother-in-law, as they had applied several times for Australian landing permits. When their permits were granted, their landing fee was cabled from a Hartmann relative in New York.

## Job Prospects

One document alone names 40 people granted permission to land in Australia. Having a guaranteed offer of employment and the £200 landing fee gave people their best chance. Agricultural experience and domestic work were amongst the best pathways to acceptance by Canberra. Erika Wolff a multilingual typist and stenographer arrived in Australia in 1938 with plans to be a governess. In Britain, the Quakers set up agricultural training centres and the GEFC made placements at training farms in Bathurst, Wagga and the Hawkesbury.

'Being a fellow Quaker I would naturally like to do what is possible' wrote Camilla Wedgwood about Ludvig Heinemann, but no job could





be found for a jeweller in Australia. Mr W. Hamburger wrote a desperate but dignified letter in March 1939. He had a background in forestry and sawmills, and a certificate of proficiency in English from the University of Cambridge, but had no success through the German Jewish Aid Committee in London, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society or the Australian government. He explained 'we in our loneliness set our entire hope upon Australia'.

Medical doctors and musicians had poor prospects. 'Two of the strongest trades' unions in this country seem to be the Medical Association and the Musicians' Union, and both are taking a very hostile and dog-in-the-mangerish attitude towards refugee and other foreign migrants,' wrote Wedgwood. Twenty-nine-year-old Dr. Irene Katz-

Pulgram was especially fortunate; she was granted a permit and able to requalify, however, gynaecologist Dr. Rudolf Huebel did not receive that opportunity. Although he retrained as a manicurist/pedicurist to improve his prospects, the GEFC were unable to guarantee his employment in Australia. The outcome for a female dentist who retrained as a sweet maker in the hopes of setting up a shop remains unrecorded.

### Conclusion

The volume of correspondence to and from the GEFC was enormous. Swamped with work, Wedgwood admitted, 'to work like this, one has to develop the hide of a rhinoceros.' Her humanity however is obvious and she took a firm line with the Australian government, articulately

and tactfully arguing for solutions. The GEFC worked cooperatively with international organisations, with the Australian Jewish Welfare Society and with various church committees. When war broke out though, military shipping gained priority over passengers. There was little more the Society of Friends could do.

The value in the Quaker Collection lies with its contribution to holocaust archives. It reveals transnational networks of Quakers, humanitarians, pacifists and concerned citizens. It adds to the textured narratives of victims and advocates, perpetrators and survivors. Importantly for the museum, it provides additional testimony, and is a wonderful resource for research into the Australian response.

AF



# AC Flower

## *Convict and Sometime Quaker*

MALCOLM WHYTE | CANBERRA REGIONAL MEETING

I thought I was the first, and only, Quaker in my family tree, but recently I was made aware by my son Bruce that I had a great-great uncle who was a convict and a Quaker early in the nineteenth century. Here is his story drawn from various sources<sup>1</sup> through the Internet.

Richard Edwards, whose real name was Abraham Charles Flower, was tried in the Old Bailey Criminal Court in London on my birth date, 26 October, 193 years ago in 1826 and indicted with two other men, William Powell and John Harris (alias Walker), for stealing a graining comb<sup>2</sup>, 'three inches and a half long', valued at 1s.10d [about \$A16 today], found guilty of 'Theft: grand larceny' and transported for seven years. He had been born in Leominster, the son of Abraham Flower, a wholesale jeweller in London; he had a wife Susannah Matilda Flower (nee Pettitt) and a son, Abraham; and was listed at his trial as a lighterman and labourer. My mother was a Flower.

On the convict hulk *Coromandel* (with 300 aboard) he was transported to Bermuda. He was repeatedly put in irons for misbehaviour and considered 'contemptuous and mutinous', and then, because of his 'truculence', he was sent to Van Diemen's Land on the *Royal George*. He arrived in Hobart on 18th October 1830 and was banished to the extremely harsh penal settlement on Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour. Even there he was a trouble-maker but he was influenced by the resident Wesleyan Minister and he was one of three convicts converted to Quakerism by two visiting Quaker Missionaries from London, James Backhouse and

George Washington Walker. He settled down and was transferred to Hobart where he was assigned as a servant to Government House (perhaps with Quaker assistance). Having served his sentence of seven years he received his freedom 'on the 26th of the 10th month 1833'.

As Richard Edwards, he applied for his wife Susannah Matilda Flower and son Abraham to come to Van Diemen's Land under the Convict Family Reunion Scheme at government expense. The Scheme aimed to help 'readdress the imbalance of gender in the colonies and provide an incentive to good behaviour among the male convicts'. Matilda and Abraham, among 49 passengers and 151 women convicts, arrived in Hobart on 4th September 1834 on the convict ship *Edward*. Five children were then born in Van Diemen's Land.

In the census of 1837 he and Susannah Flower were in New Town and in the Census of 1843 he was in Murray Street, Hobart, in charge of a house with five others, all free, all Quakers.

Abraham Flower had contact with Quakers while on the Hulk, and then on Sarah Island, and it continued with permission to attend meetings while still a convict in servitude at Government House in Hobart. He was visited by Backhouse and Walker with a view to formal membership of the Movement (The Religious Society of Friends) and this was approved on the 14th day of the tenth month (October) 1833; that is, while still a convict he became a member of the newly established Hobart Monthly Meeting. Five others with convict experience

also became members. 'Backhouse and Walker had to combat a certain amount of prejudice among some friends who resented the acceptance of convicts into the Meeting'.

Abraham was very active as a Member and Minister ('recognising his gift for speaking acceptably in Meetings for Worship') and acting Clerk and he remained closely associated with Backhouse and Walker who regarded him to be 'a prop to the struggling Hobart Meeting during their periods of absence'. Interestingly in view of his later monetary problems he and another Friend were appointed in 1838 'to advise Friends of Hobart Town to keep proper accounts'! After an incident at home another member remarked that 'it is a pleasant prospect to have a neighbour of such approved honesty as one of the Society of Friends'. He did, however, 'depart from the path of strict adherence to the truth when he recorded himself in the [1843] Census as having 'arrived free'. Desire to distance himself from a distasteful memory was perhaps understandably strong enough to silence any momentary promptings of a Quaker conscience'. Backhouse expressed the exhilaration which Flower's transformation had aroused in the hearts of friends and

*that one of the despised, hated and persecuted little band at Macquarie Harbour should become an accredited minister of a body of Christians ... cannot but be considered as one of those glorious triumphs of Grace which cause the saints to rejoice, to adore and to love the Saviour with increasing ardour.*



Rechabites 'tent' in Bung Bong, rural Victoria. Photo By National Litchfield – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikipedia

He tried various jobs – butcher, milkman, farmer – and despite three hundred pounds being left to him by his father, he became insolvent in 1841. This led to a prolonged investigation by the Hobart Monthly Meeting and in 1844, after he and his family had moved to Launceston, he was to be visited as to ‘the conduct of the said Friend and as to his clearness with respect to his pecuniary circumstances’. There were more problems in Launceston and finally, a Certificate of Removal was prepared and upheld by the Van Diemen’s Land Yearly Meeting on the 3rd day of the fourth month 1845.

The Launceston Meeting had minuted his failing in a business venture (exporting fruit to Port Phillip), slowness in clearing his debts and ‘involving himself with a secret society, the Order of Rechabites’. This society was founded in 1835 ‘with a commitment to Teetotalism’. In March 1847 the Meeting ‘ruled that the Rechabites, like the Freemasons, ‘fall under definition of secret societies’, that ‘the adoption of badges, insignia and passwords and signs was inconsistent with Christian simplicity and gravity’, that time spent in meetings was ‘misspent time’, and that coffee houses [where their

meetings were frequently held] were public houses’. When Abraham had persisted in his Rechabite connection the meeting formally disowned him.

A letter to him from George Washington Walker in Hobart in 1847, regretted his association in Launceston with the Rechabite Tent but agreed with him being ‘disowned’ by the Launceston Monthly Meeting of Quakers and ceasing ‘to be a member of our Religious Society’ while admitting that ‘many times has my own soul been refreshed in contemplating thy Christian deportment, and in feeling the influence of thy fervent and lively exercise on behalf of others, which was, i have no doubt blefred [blessed] to the edification of many as well as myself.’ He pleaded with him to ‘consider rather, whether in the sight of the Lord thou art not verily guilty of having departed in heart from him – of having ‘left thy first love”, to repent, and longed for him to be ‘restored to the full measure of His favour’ and to ‘be reinstated in membership with us, and be restored to full unity with thy friends, who be assured cherish still a warm interest in thy welfare.’ Signed ‘I remain Thy sincere Friend, Geo W Walker’. Elsewhere Walker expressed

his verdict as ‘I still believe that much lies at the door of those who shut up the bowels of compassion against an erring brother’.

And again in the ‘3mo. 1849’, a letter to ‘My dear friend Abm Chas. Flower’ with ‘fervent desires for thy welfare ... that thou mayst lay aside every weight, and the sin which may easily beset thee ... yield thyself unreservedly to his will, cost what it may, lest thou should fail in receiving the end of thy faith, even the salvation of they soul’.

And again in the ‘5 mo. 50’ to ‘Dear Abraham’, having seen a letter from him to Wm Horten ‘that has filled my mind with sorrow on thy account, and for thy family’ re his ‘utter destitution’, and urging him ‘instead of waiting till means may drop into his hands to enable him to obtain journey man’s wages, if it be had, and earn at any rate food and raiments in the meantime rather than starve in idleness.’ He enclosed ‘a pound [about \$A195 today], which, with what I know others are sending, will temporarily assist’. He refers to another letter he sent to him ‘when thou wast in Melbourne’.

Abraham had gone on the *Swan* to Melbourne in 1849 then to the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

goldfields near Castlemaine. Susannah died in 1858. In 1868 [aged 63, 27 years before he died] two travelling Quaker ministers, Joseph Neaves and Walter Robson, discovered Abraham near Castlemaine, and Walter gave the following picture of 'the old man':

*His wife being deceased and his family married and settled elsewhere, he lived alone, his occupation, gold-digger, which brings him in an income of about five shillings [about \$A 26 today] per week. He is in a most happy and thoughtful state, telling us his wants were well supplied, his little two roomed hut, of his own building, enabling him to live rent-free. He keeps some goats which supply him with milk. We had a very precious time with him, a brook by the way..... A few months ago he was put in jail for a little debt which he had offered*

*payment of, but his creditor, an unprincipled man, who has since been sold off, and ruined himself, refused to accept the money when offered and from spite, we suppose, put the old man to jail. Even here he was happy and it was very instructive to us both to see how humble and tender and sensible of his many shortcomings he was, yet so full of the love of Jesus and gratitude to him' and 'there was nothing of unkind feelings towards those who had been instrumental in his separation from Friends.*

Abraham Charles Flower, listed as a carpenter, died in Echuca in Dec 1895 aged 90 and was buried in the nearby Moama Cemetery.

In retrospect, maybe he suffered from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) resulting from his experiences as a convict; that he over-spent his

money on alcohol to assuage his distress; and that he sought help from the Rechabites to control his drinking and thereby his indebtedness; and that he went on to live a simple life and be 'most happy'.

How amazing that this life was set on its course by a little comb!

1 Especially Old Bailey Proceedings, documents held by the University of Tasmania library (including a biography by Betty Mason, AC Flower's great great granddaughter), the PhD thesis 'Quakers in Australia in the Nineteenth Century' by WN Oats, and an account of Quaker Missions in Launceston and Northern Tasmania by Michael Bennett in the Launceston Historical Society.

2 Used to imitate expensive grained wood.

AF

#### EARTH STORY – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

time with the most precious Nanna Violet, an Aboriginal lore woman who defies description. She requested that I 'sing' the burnt country when I return. Sing the trapped spirits of the animals.

Of course issues of cultural appropriation and humility arose – as they do in the telling – but one does not argue with Nanna when she makes a request. One assumes she knows exactly what she is doing – in all its complexities. So that remained my focus – as it does in the telling.

Though I have a deep personal connection to 'country' – my first and foremost personal journey is as a Peace activist – human 'inner peace' as a pathway to collective, social Peace. My focus in Earth Care has always been that when we care for ourselves and each other – care of the Earth is a no brainer, natural consequence. Natural pun intended.

Thus my thinking about extending 'care' on my journey home into the heart of the bushfires – had a human focus. However we don't argue with Nanna

and of course – Nanna was right.

So I sang. Up and down the charred coast and over barren mountain ranges I sang. Nanna said I would find my song and I did.

The majestic, glorious tree on the cover – answered my song. As I laid my face in her charred skin and wrapped my arms around her – she whispered to me – 'come'. She took me through her scarred trunk deep into the Earth, where glorious, potent life throbbed in unimaginably, untouched Beauty. Beneath Her and through Her.



*Deep in the Earth.  
The growth.  
Shining green on black.*

*Luminous in the contrast  
Resilience.  
Determination.  
Recovery  
Long ... deep ... together  
On all Earth*

She directed me to the evidence sprouting through the ashes on her branches ... red dresses of new life. She told me of how we humans tend to only see the surface chaos and devastation ... never knowing the throb of Life that is below. That is relentlessly blooming within the Chaos. Knowing the contrast of Chaos – as the definer of Beauty. The sunrise ever more beautiful after the storm.

She told me we see the surface of each other and ourselves, in appearance and deed – rarely sensing the throb of Life that is beneath every skin equally. She told me that we NEED what we call 'natural disaster' in equal proportions that we NEED to understand the equal throb of life in every human. Beyond

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# Know Thy Friend: Sally McGushin

PETER JONES | TASMANIA REGIONAL MEETING

Sally McGushin is a Yorkshire lass who came out to Australia in 1965 as a Ten Pound Pom. She was the eldest of four children whose father had been appointed as the medical officer in New Norfolk in the Derwent Valley.

As her mother was a lapsed Anglican, Sally was baptised in that denomination but got sent to The Friends' School in Year Four because her parents wanted her to attend a co-educational school and liked Quaker ideas.

These were the William Oats years and at Junior School, young Sally had enjoyed the Scripture classes when 'Cracker' Morris had told them stories.

At High School, she was particularly influenced by Richard Meredith and from him, developed an interest in current affairs as well as appreciating Quaker silence time.

As a result, she went on to the University of Tasmania to study Political Science and Law though she also had time to meet her future husband. They got married in the local Catholic Church after Sally had graduated but already she had been working out what she herself believed in, and had first

attended the local Friends Meeting in Hobart when she was 21 to find her future spiritual home.

Her interest in foreign affairs and social justice had led her to participate in a Community Aid Abroad (now OXFAM Australia) study tour to India. This in turn led her to start her research in the role of voluntary organisations in India, especially those with a Gandhian perspective, and in 1985 she spent six months in North East India doing fieldwork, based in Calcutta.

Her husband had started work as a rural GP, so Sally found herself moving around as they started their family, but always reasonably near a Meeting for Worship – first in Launceston, then Hobart, even when Dr. Gerry finally settled the family in Queenstown.

She had become involved in QSA with Val Nicholls and started to organise an annual Walk Against Want there. In addition, she had kept up her studies and started training as a Nursing Mothers Counsellor.

In addition, Sally organised an annual candle day for Amnesty, a tradition she continued when the family moved to Hobart.

The family used their spacious overflow doctor's accommodation in Queenstown to host visits from Hobart Young Friends, especially when the teenagers had got washed out on the West Coast or needed a base to explore Macquarie Harbour or go for a ride on the West Coast railway.

When Sally, Gerry and their three children moved back to Hobart for their children's further education at The Friends' School, Sally was soon appointed as an Elder and put on various Committees. She had become involved in working with refugees through CAA and had taken up ESL tutoring as well as teaching some of them to drive.

When asylum seekers were housed out at Pontville, Sally went to visit them there and has continued her involvement since then in various different ways.

Today, Sally feels that she is still part of a Continuous Journey, that feeling she had identified when she had first been attracted to Friends, and which has remained with her ever since.

AF

## EARTH STORY – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

belief, culture or deed. She told me the need to know our interconnectivity had never been greater on this planet.

Disaster brings us together. All appearances of separateness drop away. You can't buy, talk, educate, posture or

light work your way out of it. When humans flee disaster together – we are one.

The burning question now is – how do we stay that way? The Earth is clearly stating there is no longer any

other option for survival of humanity.

This is not a climate emergency. This is a spiritual emergency. A connectivity emergency.

That's the Story.

AF



# QSA Notes

## QSA and toilets

JACKIE PERKINS | QSA ADMINISTRATOR



Savy



Sen

Friends, this is the exciting news you have been waiting for – what happened about the toilets in our latest fund raising appeal? I can now tell you that with your help, a total of 30 toilets will be provided to rural communities in Kampong Thom province in Cambodia. The two communities have all received training in basic health, hygiene, and how to take care of a toilet, as for many of them, this is a new concept. This training is in addition to the permaculture training, funded by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and QSA.

So now to answer your questions about what sort of toilet will they be. QSA's project partner, the provincial office of the Department of Women's Affairs with its director Siphon and project consultant Sithol (whom some of you may remember meeting several years ago) consulted several government

departments about toilet design and placement. The problems are that the soils in this province are generally very sandy, and also that the region regularly floods. The flooding is not usually to dangerously high levels, or for an extended length of time. In fact, the flood distributes nutrient rich silt over the land, so for agriculture, it's a bonus. However, for the matter of toilets, it is a different matter. Toilet designs relying on seepage to remove contents would be a health hazard, especially during the floods. Dry composting toilet designs, which other NGOs have tried to install, are not used by the people, as they have a strong belief that an amount of water is needed for the toilet to be effective, not as much as we require for a flushing toilet, but some water is needed.

The final design is one to be located a short distance from the house, of a squat design rather than sitting design,

with, of course, screening around it for privacy. A pipe connected to the back of the toilet takes contents into a concrete tank positioned in the ground to allow for gravity to assist. This tank, made of concrete is a box with a removable lid, to enable it to be emptied by a company operating tankers with pumps which, for a minimal fee, remove the contents for treatment at sewage works. In addition, a smaller tank to hold water is supplied close to the toilet, and a small dipper, similar in size to a very small saucepan, enables a small quantity of water to be added each time of use. It works well, and everyone is delighted.

So who will be receiving one? The communities have already decided the selection criteria. Obviously, the first criterion is for a family that does not have one already. Then they considered large families; those with an elderly member in the family living



Nan, on Jackie's right, with members of her family, and Siphon in the white hat.

there; women headed households; and families who have a member who has a disability. Here are four of those selected. Permission was given for each of the photographs taken, photo credit QSA.

Savy and Eang have five children and Eang's 70-year-old mother living with them. They are part of the permaculture training course, and have already established a very good vegetable garden which feeds the family as well as giving them some surplus produce to sell in the market.

Sen is a widow, and is not in good health. She has moved out of the home where she and her husband raised their five children, passing it to her eldest son and his family, and she lives in a smaller house built close by on the land. Sen

concentrates her energies in growing vegetables and herbs as they require less work, and also in raising chickens. She has also secured a very lucrative contract with a phone company, and has a phone tower on her land for which she receives US\$70 per month. In the photograph you can see Sen tending her lemon grass plants which are ready for harvesting, for which she will sell for about US\$0.40 per kilo.

Soleu is 25 years old, lives with her husband Chamreaun and their two sons, one at school and the other a toddler. They have no well but have kind neighbours who let them take water from their pond for irrigating their crops of spinach, lettuce, amaranth, taro and water convolvulus and for their chickens. The village chief has asked

if this family can also have a well, as they are finding life to be very difficult, and Siphon and Sithol have agreed to support them in this way.

And finally, Nan aged 72 years, married to San who is 82. Over the years, they have adopted seven children, which is quite a common situation now as parents are forced to relocate for employment, as this quite remote rural area has no employment opportunities except agriculture.

QSA and the communities in Kampong Thom are grateful for your support, helping the whole community to better general health outcomes. We will continue to fund raise for this worthwhile cause, one which really is making a difference. Contributions always welcome!

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

Find us on Facebook for more photos and stories: [facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia](https://facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia).

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# Sydney Mardi Gras Fair Day

## Queer?

K WOODHOUSE | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

When Wies Schuiringa and I collected the resources from Devonshire Street Meeting House for our stall at the MG Fair Day, we made a quick decision to use the same banners and placards that we'd used in 2018, as they had all seemed appropriate way back then.

But while Wies was cleaning the main 3m-long banner, she wondered if the wording had really become a bit dated and not reflective of our intention to be inclusive. It reads 'WE ARE QUAKERS, SUPPORTING GAY & LESBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS.' After asking around, Wies learnt that the banner had probably originally

been made for the MG Parades in 1990s. BTIQ+ had hardly entered the conversation then. As it was too short notice for us to produce a new banner for this year's Fair, we decided to stick a notice onto the existing banner stating 'Historic banner first used in the 1994 Mardi Gras parade' (we now think it was probably 1997), and to print some wording 'Quakers supporting LGBTQI+ rights' for the smaller placards.

Twenty years ago, when I was involved in spiritual outreach in the gay and lesbian communities in London, there was some discussion about how to include transgender people in the words and acronyms we used. I suggested using the word Queer as an all-encompassing shorthand for human diversity of gender and sexuality. But some of the older generation of gay men in particular were horrified by my suggestion, as they remembered too well when Queer was only used in derogatory terms, and they certainly weren't ready to reclaim it. So we settled on LGBT.

You may have

noticed over the years that the number of letters in the acronym has been increasing. At this year's Fair Day, we used LGBTQI+ on our placards. But + can extend to A+. In 2017, the Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship of Britain Yearly Meeting (called the Friends Homosexual Fellowship prior to about 1990) again changed their name, and are now known as the Quaker Gender and Sexual Diversity Community (QSDC). They admit on their website that this is unwieldy and they are happy to be called Queer Quakers for short.

We would like to design a new banner for future Mardi Gras and may choose to use the word Queer. So, I'm going to put it out there and use it in this article to refer to LGBTQI+. If you are not comfortable with the Queer tag, please write in and express your views.

### Why have a stall again in 2020?

NSWRM feel there are good reasons. Here are some of them:

1. It is an opportunity for Quakers to engage in spiritual outreach to Queer people and the large (80,000 according to the organisers) and diverse crowd of Fair-goers, witnessing to our inclusivity.

2. It is an opportunity to mutually support the very small handful of church and faith communities (six this year) that dare to reach out to Queer people by having a stall at the Fair Day.



The Quaker stand with the banner.





Quavering Quakers



Sydney Queer Muslim stand.

3. It bears witness to the continuing Quaker advocacy for the human rights of marginalised peoples throughout our history. According to the Human Dignity Trust's website, there are 73 jurisdictions today that criminalise private, consensual, same-sex sexual activity. At least six implement the death penalty – Iran, Northern Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen – and the death penalty is a legal possibility in Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar and UAE.

4. It is a fun day out for those Quakers who volunteer on the stall and an opportunity to celebrate our diversity.

After a break for about ten years, we decided to have a stall in 2018 after the very divisive postal survey and legislation on same sex marriage in the second half of 2017. At that time, Quakers had a media and social media presence supporting the 'yes' vote. Wies recalls:

'The media reported many church leaders and members saying some awful things about homosexuality and same sex marriage. I found it important for a faith tradition to be seen at the Fair Day and bear witness to a different understanding.'

Wies, being on the board of the Ecumenical Council of NSW, has her antennae up when news regarding the 'church's position' on Queer issues is

broadcast. She writes:

'In the second half of 2019, we have seen some church leaders and members going public about the draft Religious Discrimination bill that was released in July 2019, demanding special privileges that no other group has in our society (*The Australian Friend*, December 2019). Most church leaders are still smarting about the same sex marriage legislation.

And Israel Folau was getting a lot of media exposure about his sacking from the ARU (Australian Rugby Union) for social media posts about homosexuals, among others, going to hell and imploring them to repent.

Then in October, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney also received a lot of media attention when he was quoted to have said that 'if you don't agree with our doctrine against same sex marriage, then leave the church.' Later he corrected this by saying that he intended this to be addressed to Anglican Bishops only. A minority of Anglican Bishops support at least blessings of same-sex relationships.

Many people in Australia are not familiar with the wide range of beliefs by and within Christian churches. Often reports in the media quoting a Christian leader is taken to encompass everything to do with Christianity and churches in Australia.

So, it was time again to bear witness

that there are faith traditions that support homosexuality (not the 'don't tell, don't ask' variety) and same-sex marriage. It was time for our testimony of equality to be aired again.'

Amongst almost 300 stalls in Victoria Park this year, there were six religious organisations with stalls; three 'churches' (Uniting Church, Quaker, Metropolitan Community Church), one other church group (for LGBTI Catholics and their families), one group for LGBTI Jews and their families and, for the first time, the Sydney Queer Muslims had a stall in their own name (note that they too are adopting the Queer tag) – last year they had put their toe in the water by piggy-backing on another stall.

In 2020 they are a bravely visible and joyous bunch, and brought an extra smile to many Fair-goers' faces by decluttering their stall of benches and chairs, and laying rugs on the ground to welcome us in to their space for a chat and to offer us pastries. A cause for celebration!

This year the organisers had largely grouped stalls together according to themes, so we Quakers expected to be near other religious organisations. However, when the four Quakers who had volunteered to set up the stall arrived at our pre-allocated site, we discovered it had been taken over by

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# The Hermeneutical Gap

## *Speaking and listening in Meeting*

PETER H BENNETT | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING

**D**uncan Frewin's article on spoken ministry (*The Australian Friend*, December 2019) is a carefully written and thoughtfully constructed appeal to us to dig deeply before rising to speak. Duncan begins by presenting us with three different scenarios in which a Friend offers the spoken word in a Meeting for Worship.

In the first scenario, the minister speaks to the condition of the auditors – Duncan will go on to characterise this as 'true ministry', a term he uses no fewer than eighteen times throughout the article. In the second and third case, the speaker falls somewhat short of offering true ministry. In the light of these scenarios, Duncan goes on to examine with care and careful attention to detail, what makes some cases of vocal ministry, true ministry and others not.

These are difficult matters. It seems clear that ministry that is racist, sexist or advocates a particular political agenda may fall short of being true ministry.

This is characterised in the third of the settings Duncan invites us to reflect upon. He writes: 'A Friend stands and starts speaking, perhaps preaching their own version of Quaker ways, perhaps meandering over thoughts that are meaningful only to him or her, perhaps insisting on the truth of a political stand.'

In such a situation we should, maybe, not be surprised if an Elder intervenes to gently encourage the Friend to re-enter the silence. But not all errant ministry is so clearly outside of right ordering. In seeking to get a grip on those occasions which fall short of being true ministry but are not obviously errant, Duncan reflects upon the aetiology (my term, not his) of ministry – from whence does it come?

Without wanting to over-simplify Duncan's thesis, he argues that ministry that comes from the Spirit, from God and not our intellectual ruminations is true ministry. True ministry, he contends, is borne in true worship. 'Quakers,' he writes 'hold that Ministry comes from God, not from the speaker's thinking or intellectual effort. True Ministry may come from the least articulate of us, and the most fluent speaker may have nothing to offer.

How do we distinguish between Ministry that comes from the Spirit, and speaking that is from the speaker alone, no matter how sincere?' The answer lies somewhere in understanding clearly the true nature of worship and listening – listening to/for the voice of God, the voice of the Spirit.

Now it seems to me that in considering the matter of spoken ministry, we must make a distinction between the advice we can give the speaker and the advice we can give the auditor.

When it comes to spoken ministry Quakers do have some 'rules' or guidelines, at least that is my understanding. Here are four of them:

Friends are discouraged from coming to Meeting for Worship having prepared something in advance to say, be it a 'reading' or a mini sermon. It has always been my understanding that Friends are urged to say what comes to them during the Meeting. This is to do with what I called above the aetiology of testimony. We are urged to say that which is moved by the Spirit or by God *within the context* of the Meeting for Worship. If we choose to speak, we are encouraged to speak from within the gathered silence and stillness of the Meeting.

Second, if one feels or believes that something has come to one that should be said, I was taught to disavow the urge three times. I practise this technique. If I feel moved to speak I will actively engage in an inner dialogue whereby I will seek to persuade myself to remain silent. Because I practise this technique I will, very often, remain quiet and will not speak. If I do rise to testify to what has come to me I am usually overcome with doubt about the worth or value of my words. I often feel inadequate and sometimes resume my seat full of regret for having spoken and interrupted the

silence and stillness of the Meeting.

Third, Friends are encouraged to keep a Quakerly 'distance' between testimonies. If a Friend has spoken and then a second or third person rises to speak, each subsequent speaker is urged to wait a respectful period of time between ministries to allow for the Meeting to reflect and meditate on what has been said. This practice allows us to avoid what has euphemistically and humorously been referred to as 'popcorn' Meetings.

Finally, Friends are strongly encouraged to speak only once in a Meeting for Worship.

I was recently in a Meeting when a Friend spoke twice. What was said in the second utterance was not errant but the Meeting seemed to bristle with disapproval – or, at least, that's how it seemed to me. Perhaps I was 'reading' the resultant silence wrongly. This 'rule' is there for good reason. Meeting for Worship is not a discussion group and the second utterance is often a comment upon what a previous minister has said. And if someone ministers twice, I have very often found that the third 'rule' above is violated at the same time.

These guidelines are helpful and following them allows most Meetings to be held in right ordering. But I think Duncan's article goes to much more profound matters and asks us to reflect deeply on what has moved us to speak at all and this, as I noted above, is a difficult matter.

### A brief anecdote

A number of years ago I was one of three people (all of whom were men) to speak at a Meeting for Worship at Orrong Road Meeting House in

Melbourne. At the end of the Meeting four Friends spoke to me about my testimony. Three thanked me in various ways and in a Quakerly fashion with comments like 'Thee spoke to my condition this morning Friend.' But the fourth, coffee cup in hand and with vehemence came up to me and said: 'I don't come to Meeting to be lectured by men, Peter.' I was shocked and not a little hurt, but it made me ponder how differently we hear and receive the spoken word. How, I wondered, could people hear the same utterance so differently? The answer, of course, is that this happens when locutionary acts misfire or fail.

This occurs because of what may be called the hermeneutical gap. That is, the differential between a speaker's intentions and an auditor's interpretation of those intentions. This locutionary misfiring occurs all the time in dialectic and discourse and it is not surprising that it happens in Meetings for Worship too. So, what is to be done?

I think it is useful to follow the guidelines enumerated above. These have emerged over centuries of our faith tradition and religious practice and great wisdom lies behind them. But these traditions are there to guide the minister, the speaker, not the auditors, so what advice can we give to those of us who listen to the spoken word?

I think three virtues or 'strategies' are called for.

First, we are encouraged to really listen to the word. We should listen not only to the 'what' but also the 'how'. We should listen tenderly, actively and lovingly, seeking to understand from whence the spoken word comes. What

is it that has moved the minister to speak? Advices and Queries implores us 'to receive the vocal ministry of others in a tender and creative spirit. Reach for the meaning deep within it, recognising that even if it is not God's word for you, it may be for others.'

A second virtue is to be *open* to the movement and ministrations of the Spirit. The veracity of the spoken word may not be apparent at first but if we receive it with an open heart and a willingness to see what lies behind the utterance perhaps we may be allowed to see and discern its truth and in consequence avoid the locutionary misfiring to which I referred above.

And finally, if despite our best and most noble endeavours to receive the testimony of another we just cannot see or approve of its message we can still be patient both with the speaker and with ourselves. If the utterance warrants Eldering then let it be left in the hands of those whose job it is to care for the right ordering of the Meeting. Listening (attentively), being open, being patient – these are all virtues which the auditor can practise in the hope of avoiding locutionary misfiring.

But in the end, let us all be reminded that within the context of the unprogrammed Meeting, the default disposition is stillness and silence and therefore we could all do well to be constantly reminded of Wittgenstein's perceptive utterance:

*Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.*

AF



# Renewing a right spirit within

CHARLES STEVENSON | SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY REGIONAL MEETING

**C**an't you sit in silence at home? Why go to your meeting to do the same?' This question was posed quite recently to me. I flashed back an unconsidered reply. 'Well. It is an occasion when we can all sit as equals: no put-downs, no misunderstandings. Nobody's going to let me down.'

I knew that this was a superficial reply. I should have said that there is a hidden, ineffable communion of togetherness in the gathered silence of a meeting for worship. Isaac Penington had a far better reply. He wrote of 'An heap of fresh and living coals, warming one another, in so much as a great strength, freshness, and vigour of life flows into all.'

As time rushes me ever onwards – towards becoming a nonagenarian, I find that I no longer have the stamina to serve on committees or to take up positions. The one constant that I do keep, however, is the meeting for worship. I still find an extra spring in my step as I get ready on a Sunday morning in anticipation of an hour of silence. I

have long pondered why this is so with me. I can only say that I like the silence. I find it an occasion when I can sink into a more authentic self than the rush of everyday living allows, where perhaps I see things from a better perspective. I know that great architecture, stained glass windows, rituals in cultic robes with special intonations of the voice inspire many of my church friends; but for me they are virtual. I am one of the minority in society who prefers a silent meeting because my own meditations are at least mine, free to wander wherever my teeming mind is led. I can search for something beyond words, something beyond the self.

I will never forget the impact of the silence of the first meeting I ever attended, in Melbourne. It gave me an inner joy, and confidence that displaced my teenage insecurity. Besides it savoured of true worship, not the musical programme that masqueraded as worship that I had been brought up to. The Psalmist expressed for me the experience of meeting for worship in words that cannot be bettered: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me' (Ps 51:10).

I have attended meetings for worship in various parts of the world. Sometimes there has been moving ministry. At other times one wonders what that particular contribution had to do with anything spiritual! Has the homily on an ethical issue got a place in meeting for worship? Some ministry deadens spirituality. It is like

a fog which blankets the magnificent mountain from view. I remember a crowded meeting for worship in Birmingham when an obsessive man 'off the street', as was apologetically whispered later, spoke after every piece of ministry about dust and tiny specks of paper on the floor. It grated until ... someone transfigured it 'And then we have the chorus about the rubbish on the floor. So very relevant to life: always there is the human flaw with us ...' That transformed the meeting. Sometimes it can be a simple, even an uneducated utterance, if sincere, that the meeting can build up upon and transform into an uplifting hour.

There is a story about William Penn speaking in meeting on entering the meeting house before he sat down! I used to wonder about that sometimes at Brentford and Isleworth meeting which I attended for a time, excited to know that this had once been the celebrated Penn's meeting too. How dare I, I decided, criticise the very man who wrote so many valuable insights into a meeting for worship! Yet! There is a period of settling down into a gathered meeting, admirably expressed by Penn himself: the need to get beyond 'the noises and hurries of the mind.' So in those first few minutes the mind gurgles up its thoughts, chatter, and trivialities. At length one settles into a profound inner stillness. This experience is impressively described as 'the gathered meeting.' It begins, at best, a creative encounter with that which is

*beyond*, the unseen world of the Spirit.

It is out of this gathered meeting that true ministry will arise, often on a subject that others have been contemplating too. This can be carried forward, soaring beyond debate or correction, into a new heights, somewhere beyond. There are conventions that have evolved over years of experience: not to speak too soon after the previous speaker so that the message has time to sink in, to speak audibly, to avoid rambling to get to the succinct point, not to speak at the end of the meeting when it has been admirably concluded by someone else. Meeting is

not the place for politics and burning social issues, theological discussion, although if these can be spiritualised as an adjunct to ministry then this can be helpful. But such is difficult, yet 'true art lies in concealing art'. Ministry is never going to be perfect, or complete, but that is not the issue. What matters is that it comes out of the deep exercise of the gathered meeting.

Sometimes, of course, I come to meeting when my mind is utterly numb. I find myself counting the window panes (there were 148 in the former Toorak Meeting room). That is

when I long for some-one's ministry to quicken my mind. At other times the hour is fertile with creative thought. The true hour will reach a place *beyond*, into 'the cloud of unknowing', so that whether I consider myself Hindu, Muslim, Quaker, theist or non-theist, humanist or atheist no longer matters. Oneness is achieved in 'those things which are eternal.' Dare I say one comes away singing within the heart from a true meeting for worship, feeling that renewed spirit of which the Psalmist wrote.

AF

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# Noted

**This is our regular feature in which we briefly record interesting publications and websites that have come to our attention. Inclusion of an item in this format does not preclude a possible longer review in a later issue. We welcome suggestions for inclusion.**

We have been asked by Janet Salisbury to circulate her paper *Independent mediation for uniting action on climate change*

**Janet says:**

*The current bushfires have focused national and international attention on the roadblock we have reached in the Australian political system and it is clear we need to move fast to consider a way out of the dangerous impasse in which we find ourselves.*

**Janet's paper – just launched – has a couple of central principles:**

- It is an approach based on mediation and a future vision, and not blaming
- It is based on a belief that women have a particular role to play at this time to create a new environment for change on their own terms rather than fit into existing systems.

If you would like a copy of this paper, contact Janet at [janet.salisbury@inet.net.au](mailto:janet.salisbury@inet.net.au)



# Continuing to consider

## *Vocal Ministry*

BEV POLZIN | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING

*Our Friend, Duncan Frewin, in December 2019, laid out in The Australian Friend some thoughtful comments on spoken ministry within our Meetings for Worship. Duncan inferred that to be moved to speak in a Meeting for Worship is a serious call, and not to be taken lightly.*

For me, one form of Ministry I find helpful as a ‘focus’ within our Meetings for Worship, is the reading of our *Advices and Queries*, which is regularly read by a Friend appointed for this purpose. It is usually read when the Meeting is settled. These brief *Advices* offer a gentle reminder of why we are present, and sometimes lead to fuller ministry.

A lot of advice and inspiration is offered in our Books of Discipline, including passages about the matter of ‘vocal ministry’, and these passages offer rich and wise advice.

We read in *Quaker Faith & Practice* (QF&P 2.56) in 1712 that young Jane Fenn heard an inner voice declare that

she had been chosen for the ministry. She became in time a travelling Quaker Minister of note.

*Yet I must confess, this awful word of Divine command shocked me exceedingly, my soul and all within me trembled at the hearing of it; yea my outward tabernacle shook insomuch that many present observed the deep exercise I was under’*

In 1734 John Churchman wrote (QF&P 2.61)

*Ministry should be of necessity, and not of choice, and there is no living by silence, or by preaching merely.’*

Samuel Bownas in 1750 (QF&P 2.59) wrote

*Some think, through a mistaken judgement, that they must be doing something every Meeting (like the preachers of the letter, who must either be singing, preaching or praying all the time) and by such conduct they lose their interest and place in the hearts of friends by too long and too frequent appearing in both preaching and prayer. For the avoiding of which, keep close to thy gift, intently waiting to know thy place, both when to speak and when to be silent; and when thou speakest, begin under a sense of divine influence, whether it be in preaching*

*or praying; and without it, do not either preach or pray’.*

Howard Brinton in his 20th century *Guide to Quaker Practice* describes the characteristics of an acceptable spoken message to include.

- That the subject be conceived in a religious rather than a secular manner – ‘in a religious focus, one endeavours to see the matter as God would see it’
- That the message is spontaneous – is not prepared in advance
- That the message should be non-personal – the speaker should think of himself/herself as an instrument through which the Spirit speaks.
- That the message be non-argumentative – that the speaker states simply and directly a message which he/she believes will be recognised as true by its very character.
- That the message be brief – often a single sentence, spoken with reverence and conviction, carries more weight than do many words.
- That the message be unified with itself and other messages – the speaker rises with a certain concern...he weakens the effect if he passes on to other matters.

A short poem on 'Spoken Ministry in the Life' is also in *QF&P* (2.65), which I've always enjoyed. It was written by Robert Hewison in 1965.

#### In the Life

*My piece was pat and all ready to say,  
She rose first. I threw my piece away.  
My well-turned stuff  
Was not so rough  
As hers, but easy elegant and smooth.  
Beginning middle end  
It had and point  
And aptly quoted prophet priest and poet.*

*Hers was uncouth  
Wanting in art  
Laboured scarce-audible and out of joint.  
Three times she lost the thread  
And sitting left her message half unsaid.  
'Why then did thee throw it  
Into the discard?'  
Friend,  
It had head  
(Like this). Hers oh had heart.*

So often, when one is moved to offer vocal ministry, one is uncertain how

it has been received. I'm sure I'm not the only one who struggles to know whether what I have felt moved to offer has been appropriate.

I was very pleased to note Duncan's acknowledgement that it is important that, if the message was heard and found helpful if, indeed it was, it could be acknowledged. Perhaps we can bring back the phrase he mentioned 'Thee was highly favoured today' to encourage our ministers?

AF

#### SYDNEY MARDI GRAS FAIR DAY – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

another (non-religious) organisation. Long story, but the volunteer marshals/supervisors initially offered us a new stall site that was remote from the other religious organisations. 'Quakers identify as a religious organisation!' we protested.

Eventually, after we'd been at the park for two hours, a spare stall was carted by volunteers to a vacant site across the pathway from the other religious organisations. Our Quaker presence alongside them represented a show of solidarity. A member of the Uniting Church conveyed their thanks for our submissions on the draft Religious Discrimination Bill (*The Australian Friend*, December issue). We accepted their thanks on behalf of the AYM Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee. A member of the Metropolitan Community Church joined us for some singing. We are glad we waited in the light for the re-organisational wheels to turn.

Eleven Quakers volunteered on

the stall from Devonshire Street and Wahroonga Local Meetings, each doing a shift of between two and four hours. In the afternoon, some of us busked beside our stall with a pre-prepared program of songs from various Quaker and other song-books, mostly well-known rather than specifically Quaker songs.

#### What our volunteers said of their experience:

*There was a community, sort of carnival atmosphere. It was wonderful to be there amongst people enjoying themselves. Everyone was there to be themselves and to support each other.*

*The Fair Day was lots of fun; some of us got our faces painted with glitter art.*

*I find singing together an acceptable and enjoyable way of communicating a message in many situations [rallies,*

*vigils, marches...] I will only come to these things if there is an opportunity to sing.*

*It was a good opportunity to show support for my gay and lesbian friends'*

*'It was good to spend time and do something with other Quakers'*

*'Even the sexy bits were funny.*

We did not proactively hand out pamphlets, but we had piles of the pamphlet 'About Quakers' on our stall. I estimate that 50-100 pamphlets were taken by passers-by who did not stop to have a conversation with us. A good number did stop to engage in conversations. Of those who wrote in our visitors' book, a typical comment was 'It was lovely to talk to some Quakers – so inclusive.'

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# The Australian Friend

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