

## **MY NOTES ON SESSIONS AND INTERVIEWS**

(BRITAIN YEARLY MEETING IN SESSION, JULY 29- AUGUST 6, 2017

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK, COVENTRY.)

BY CAROL BRADLEY ON BEHALF OF EDUCATION & OUTREACH COMMITTEE,  
CANADIAN YEARLY MEETING.

**Background:** Britain Yearly Meeting-in-session (BYM) is held every 4<sup>th</sup> year as a week-long residential gathering for all ages. Its overall timetable and set-up is not dissimilar to that of Canadian Yearly Meeting in Session (CYM). Mornings are reserved for business, and for treatment of the session's theme. Wednesday is given over to an array of activities on and off-campus, or free time. Afternoons are for groups and other activities, and the evenings of Sunday through Tuesday were keynote lectures. Thursday evening was an "As Led" session for business. Friday morning was for epistles and wrap-up motions, and on Saturday morning we were simply invited in to Meeting for farewell until 2018, which will be held in London.

Extensive materials were posted in advance on the BYM website at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym/>, including not only Documents-in-Advance (DiA) :Part 1 (Yearly Meeting Agenda and Notes), and Part 2 (Draft Minutes). The material there now includes keynote lectures, portions of talks relating to the theme that were given as part of morning sessions, and links to facebook and blogs. The DiA and much other material (Trustees' Annual Report, Tabular Statement (i.e. Statistical report), Epistles & Testimonies, etc.) was also available in printed format. I have sent one copy of the material I came home with to Cameron, and will see that other copies get to the CYM office in Ottawa.

The campus of the University of Warwick at Coventry is well-situated on the outskirts of the city in a beautifully treed grounds. Friends were housed in university residence apartments with self-catering kitchens, or the ability to take meals at the university cafeteria. Large main meetings took place in the arts centre, seating about 1200 in concert-hall style, with overflow and other meeting spaces. Registration and information facilities, with informal gathering space and the book shop were in the same building as the food services, nearby. A large outdoor plaza, with huge overhead TV screen, was a focal point where Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (now known as simply Woodbrooke) had a large tent for an information and informal gathering space.

I am very grateful to Education and Outreach committee for supporting my attendance at this powerful event with a Quaker Studies Grant. I am also glad to have had the company –when we could locate each other-- of Erika Koenig-Sheridan and Anne Marie Zilliacus, both of Ottawa Monthly Meeting. Their groundedness in our Canadian reality was supportive and fun.

The Friday prior to the July 29 start of BYM I stayed at Woodbrooke, and was very pleased to spend time with Director Sandra Berry and her partner Vick Grainger, who recall CYM 2015 in PEI with fondness and send greetings to Canadian F/friends.

Immediately after rise of Meeting on Saturday August 5, Erika Koenig-Sheridan and I went north to Cumbria (south of the Lake District) by train for a few days at Swarthmoor Hall, home of Judge Thomas and Margaret Fell, among the earliest and best of George Fox's supporters. We recommend it strongly for lovely self-catering facilities and walking in lovely scenery.

## **THE SESSIONS:**

THEME: 2017's BYM was the third in a three-year consideration of "Living out Our Faith in the World". In 2016, Friends thought about how we use our gifts, and how we recognize, test and support our concerns. This year was to conclude the study, with special attention to working with others and movement-building. Agenda Committee had determined to focus worship and discernment around HEART, HEAD, HANDS, FEET.

First Session: Sunday 9:30 am. Welcome. 227 Young Friends, also 43 volunteers and 8 staff. See Minutes 3-6. Agenda Committee introduced the HEART theme: see Appendix 1 of D-i-A. Elizabeth Allen and George Lakey spoke. Their introductions and talks can also be found on <http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym> at this time, as can most other talks and material referenced..

Evening Session: Sunday. Minutes on Stewardship and Meeting for Sufferings: Minutes 7 – 10. Item 11: revision to F&P: changes 13-19, from 'listed informal groups' to 'Quaker recognized bodies". There were 2 'word-smithing' changes accepted from the floor: remove 'free-standing', change 'independent' to 'autonomous'. Very very orderly and Spirit-led.

Morning session: Monday. Dealt with Nominations. Anne-Marie had an informal opportunity to speak with Fred Ullathorne: BYM Treasurer.

Agenda Committee introduced the HEAD theme: Simon Whiting, Program head of QPO (? : sic). 'Speaking Truth to Power': what if power already knows the truth but carries on anyway. Mark 3:23: Power = Strong Man. How to break into his house, immobilize him and take his possessions. Our struggle is to get free and turn the tide. Being smart (wise as serpents). Research, surveillance, analysis. Gave a number of action tools. Vulnerable pillars, moving speed and attitudes....

Evening session: Monday: Swarthmoor Lecture, by Catherine West, M.P., titled "Faith in Politics". Ms. West is Member of Parliament for a London borough, a member of a Northwest London Quaker meeting, and entered politics at the municipal level where the Council she led worked extensively on a Fairness agenda. The audio is at [https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/resource-category/the\\_swarthmore\\_lecture/](https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/resource-category/the_swarthmore_lecture/). Printed copies were available immediately in the book store.

Morning session: Tuesday: (A very quiet and relaxed atmosphere on campus unlike previous 2 days: people seemed to have settled in). Trustees Report: see D-i-A. The Clerk of Trustees (Ingrid Greenhow) made a long and full report, with Peter Ullathorne (Treasurer) and Paul Parker, (Recording Clerk), 'the interface between governance and management work'. The new 5-person management team was introduced: Recording Clerk and Deputy (i.e., the heads of administrative staff), Head of Finance, Head of Service and Head of Quaker Work. BYM Trustees take a wide view of their work and responsibilities, and work actively. Some current work will include definition of Job Titles ( a need to be clear and comprehensible, particularly when working collaboratively, both within and outside Quakers), and Right Use of Reserves.

The meeting expressed general thanks to the Trustees. From the floor: "what is being done about the inexorable decline? what can be done? Attenders are not increasing either".

The Clerk advised that 500,000 GBP is being spent on Outreach. New program: 'Engaging Young Adults"; hiring a Projects Officer. During this BYM, they are holding "Clerks on the Sofa" times: anybody can come talk with trustees and clerks.

HANDS THEME: Item 22.

Siobhan Haire, has broad experience of using Quaker tools and ways of working with one another, and Bridget Walker of Swindon Area Meeting: “How ready are we to take on The Strong One NOW?” “How do we recognize the Strong One?” Evils lurking, unknowing and unrecognized. White privilege is insidious and omnipresent. Lots of tools and workshops. Government, corporations, the military, all have close connections; activists should have the same. QUNO offices in NY and Geneva are quietly important. Prophetic acts of witness. Relationship is at the HEART of what we do. Movement building is composed of points that spread like a rash!

Evening session: Tuesday: George Gorman Lecture: Tim Gee. “Movement Building from Stillness”.  
<http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym/documents-2>. Among other points, he brought these requests from Young Friends:

- Time for true equality within the Religious Society of Friends
- Equality in the decision-making process: groups of people are underrepresented.
- True welcome to diversity: should state this welcome at every meeting
- Adventurousness in committees, meetings– need easy ways to move in, minor volunteer positions, ways to co-learn and co-share positions.
- Need guidance on the norms of behaviour
- Encourage self-organized friendship circles; discussions
- Eldership and oversight: not just internal to Quakers, but external.

If your Meeting is DOING something, invite others to it. Think of the 1670's “Children of Reading Meeting”: dismantle any walls that remain around Quaker meetings, and invite the City into the Village. Action and reflection together are the core values of any Quaker Meeting. Be Blessed: set yourself on the Right Path: “Rise up and take action.”

All day Wednesday: events and programs and opportunities to be off-campus. I chose “Following Fox's Footsteps”: a bus tour of about 40 folks that visited Fenny Drayton, Atherstone, Bosworth, Mancetter and ended for lunch at Harthill Meeting House. Co-sponsored by the Area Meeting that included Hartshill MM and others in the Coventry/Birmingham wider area, along with Woodbrooke's assistance. See Annapolis Valley MM Facebook pictures.

Evening session: Salter Lecture: Molly Scott Cato. “The Role of Conscience in Public Life”. See website.

Morning Session: Thursday. FEET theme

Ann Morgan of Lancaster Meeting: 'National Living Wage Foundation'. Advocating minimum wage of 8.05 GBP (Great Britain Pounds: roughly 1 GBP = \$1.60 Canadian) , 'voluntary living wage' outside London: 8.45GBP, 'Natural Living Wage' 7.50 GBP.

The language to the Foundation's document was problematic for Quakers. Had open membership and charitable status, but removed clause 'Act within the law'. Considered “win” = Encourage”. Needed to reserve the right to lay down the campaign. This participation with a wider national group lead Quakers to examine their own practices, including wages of Wardens in meeting houses.

Bernadette O'Shea: Attended M4W since 1998; member since 2010. Child of Irish migrant workers. “Citizens UK” modelled on civil rights movements among others, including the Diggers. Active in many big cities, and refugee centres. Analysis of power: The State, The Market, Civil Society. Also aims to build relational power within organizations. Address: who holds the power: what are their self-

interests. Got commitment from Labour candidates to ongoing contact should they win. Have the same agreement with (LONDON Mayor) Sadiq Khan.

Mhairi Campbell-Jack of Scotland YM. She is the *political and parliamentary contact for BYM in Scotland*. “Radical Book Fair” and other new partners, including Chartered Institute of Taxation. They make sure when you Google 'military recruitment' you get a counter-search. Runs “Forces Watch”. British armed forces recruiting is particularly strong in Scotland, targeting schools regularly. If there is BALANCE, things happen. Organizations and movements are no stronger than the people in them! (again see website)

Evening session: Thursday: “ AS LED” : The Clerks summarized what they had heard:

- Written call for adventurous action on climate change instead of small calls for action.
- Use stories to change things for the better: the Good Stories
- Part of the epistle of New England YM: “Radical Faithfulness”
- A HEARTfelt spirit drives us
- HEAD: We need to use our intellect for effective action.
- HANDS: the way we work is as important as the work
- FEET: benefit from the experience of those who have worked with others.

Do we have the grit to accept our brokenness and live lives of radical faithfulness? What could that look like?

The ministry following included:

What is it about Movements? They are about making change. What specific steps should we take? e.g., work hard on Equality, living wage, ratio of incomes, key local changes.

BYM has had 2 recent successes: approve same sex marriages, and divestment from fossil fuels.

These were things we had control over ourselves, and also were outward-looking.

The Gorman lecture was referenced: increase our own diversity and move outward with it.

We should have a representative (or placeholder for now) for non-Europeans and for youth, on every committee.

Just show up!.

FEET: can also mean traveling further: improve conditions for people in their home countries so they don't become refugees. Oxford and Swindon Area Meetings found people in local refugee facilities were being treated with genuine cruelty. It would be nice if Quakers were no longer NICE, and refused to accept what is happening 'in our name' by authorities.

Morning session Friday: Creation of Minute 36. “What does God require of us?”

Much discernment. The Minutes are now on the website.

As expressed on page 18: 'We have heard the call to examine our own diversity, particularly in our committee and organisational structure, locally and nationally. Diversity has several key dimensions and more may emerge in the future. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to look at how we can remove barriers and actively seek wider participation in the full life of our meetings, paying particular attention to race and age diversity and to keep Yearly Meeting informed in their annual report.'

Epistles, including Youth groups, were received and are posted.

BYM rose from session until 2018 in London.

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## **INTERVIEWS:**

*Bearing a Travelling Minute from the Clerks of E&O, Programme and Contributions Committee of CYM, I was assisted to meet with several Clerks and staff members, who gave generously at this busy time. Thanks to all those who made this possible.; if there is anything incorrect in what follows, it is my responsibility in hearing wrong or taking poor notes.*

Clare Scott Booth, Assistant Clerk of BYM; Clerk of Agenda Committee.

Agenda committee is the one that holds the focus for BYM-in-session, plans its theme and program and manages the sessions and events. Generally 4 blocks: Business Sessions, Workshops (Monday to Thursday, for all age groups, related to theme), Groups (within BYM, wishing to present), and Activities (community-building).

Expect 1500 registrants in 2017, plus 300 day registrants. Communications: two big screen tv's, one in the plaza, and one in the Grid where indoor events, information, book shops, and other group events happen. Also posting all the time to Facebook and Twitter. Safety: Elders, St Johns Ambulance. Need for silent spaces for nourishing community. (one in the Grid, also one in the Students Union building).

Jane Dawson, Head of Exterior Communications; Communications Operations Group (COG)

Exterior Communications actually covers external and internal affairs, including advocacy. BYM subsidizes BYM-in-Session. Had 2000 at Bath (location a draw, like PEI for us); Budgetted for 1800 here. Few universities can handle this number; for the first time the university conference facility has handled bookings and accommodation. Expensive but worth it as the effort needed to do it stressed regular staff every time BYM was held (every 3 years). The Summer Gathering (family focus) was started in 2011 to be every 2 years, but became popular with older Quakers as well. BYM was residential every 4 years. The two gatherings were amalgamated to be residential every 3 years.

Alistair Fuller, Ministry and Outreach (M&O)

This position supports role-holders in Meetings, and chaplains. Spiritual nurture and growth. 'Help people find Quakers and help Quakers be worth finding'. British Quakers do commercial advertising. They use social media a lot: for example Facebook (they pay for placements), e-advertising, and work with the Communications team on blogs and Instagram. Press releases come from Communications. M&O works closely with COG which does the social media.

They have a presence now at festivals: eg Hay Book Festival. BYM is considering what more they can do with that presence. They have kits of tools for Meetings. The annual Quaker Week is managed through M&O. They have a template for "Chatter Box", which meetings use to encourage discussion. There are postcards, and a booklet (new: second in a series). There is good meeting take-up on the annual fall Quaker Week: new material prepared for most years. In 2017, M&O is planning to phone each Meeting for follow-up as to what it did: a vital Meeting reach-out. Staff pairs travel to Meetings and encourage 'Sharing our Meeting's Stories'. Other materials include: Handbook on Outreach and Inreach, "New Expressions of Quaker Community", also available as a workshop. The BYM Enquirers' Kit needs renovation. Alistair shared copies of some of this very professionally-produced material. He notes that Young Friends staffers in their mid-20's are raring to go, and adventurous on social media. This presents challenges on social media which older staff become aware they can't control.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk. (Actually Chief Administrative Officer of BYM, as the term 'Recording Clerk' is used very differently to the CYM way) He gave me a generous 30 minute-interview on August

1. He has been in the employ of Friends for 6 years; this is his 3<sup>rd</sup> BYM Gathering in this post. Indicated willingness to have Cameron Fraser be in touch with him, as I outlined the situation in which CYM had not had a General Secretary for 20 years. Referenced annual "Superintendents and Secretaries Gathering", 3 days, usually in USA, but in 2018 may be at Swarthmoor Hall. BYM is an incorporated charity; the Trustees serve for no more than two 3-year year terms, with clerks and treasurer appointed annually but normally serving three years. There are 466 local and Area Meetings. Some Area Meetings are as small as 6-8 members and not able to be fully functional; a few are so large they could be regional in scope and business. See Trustees' Report: re new 5-person management team; 180 staff. Staff are not allowed to serve on committees. Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Quaker Life are 2 of the 4 key committees and oversee the work of a significant staff complement; the other 2, Christian & Interfaith Relations and World Relations have little staff time. It is hard to lay down outgrown concerns! There is a 3-year process for the Yearly Meeting agenda, which can lead to "big decisions" at the triennial Yearly Meeting Gathering, which is residential (by contrast with the annual Yearly Meeting, which is held at Friends House in London. This is to handle expectations as to how quickly BYM and British Quakers in general are able to discern, respond and come to agreement on united action.

- 2009: Same Sex marriage (a big deal for British Quakers)
- 2011: Low Carbon Future (Canterbury Minute)
- 2014 no major decision. The theme was What it means to be a Quaker today.  
(2015 BYM: started 3 year process 'Living out our Faith in the World')
- 2017 Open to responses as to what next.
- 2018 Likely to focus on the question of whether to commission a revision of Faith & Practice
- 2020 ?

Where will 2020 BYM-in-session be held – need a place that seats minimum of 1200-1500: best, indeed perhaps only, options are the universities in York, Bath, Exeter, Coventry. Probably won't do a 'big marquee' as at Bath again: too hard to handle for footing, too noisy. Reluctant to come to same area often as local Area Meetings do get burned-out (see Wednesday activities).

In off-years to the residential gathering, BYM sets up a scheme for Bed and Breakfast for those coming to London for sessions in "The Light", the refurbished Large Meeting House conference hall in Friends House on Euston Road.

LEGACIES: it is appearing that there is a safely anticipated basis annually of 1.8 million GBP. BYM budgets on that basis, and if there are overages, sets up only short-term projects, such as refugee assistance, or temporary regional staff to improve vibrancy in meetings.

British Quakers are acknowledged to be privileged in age, race and class: a challenge.

The Single Quaker in Family (SQUIF) is also a major challenge. BYM's traditional organization makes it harder for them to take part, since they are often unavailable for weekend meetings due to family/partner responsibilities. Need to adapt to doing weeknight meetings, for instance rather than weekends. Paul felt that 70% of Quakers being SQUIFs nationally was likely low, might be 80% in cities and the south-east of the country.

Liberal Quakerism in Britain is alive and kicking and going through transformations-- despite, or perhaps because of, questioning itself!