

# **Quakers in Yorkshire**

## **Quarterly Meeting**

**held at The Mount School on Saturday 15 October 2016**

### **Reports and presentations**

[Presentation from Students](#)

[Clerk of The Mount School Committee](#)

[Clerk of Bootham School Committee](#)

[Principal \(Adrienne Richmond\) of The Mount report](#)

[Head \(Chris Jeffrey\) of Bootham report](#)

[Talk by Stephen Pittam](#)



**Welcome  
Friends!**

# What we are going to cover

- Trip to Woodbrooke
- Peace Jam in The Mount
- B.E.A.S.T in Bootham
- Quaker Pilgrimage

Quakers in  
business

Quaker  
Decision  
Making

History of  
Quakers

**Woodbrooke**

Meeting for  
Clearness

Implementing  
into school



# History of Quakers

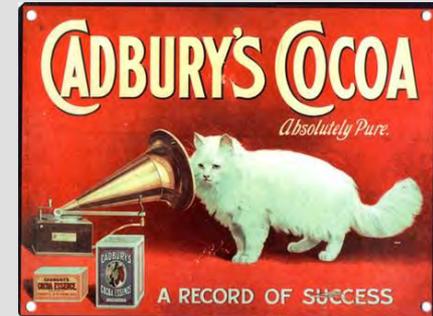
- Group learning
- Firbank fell
- Other topics
- Group presentation



# Quakers in Business



- Influence Quakerism had on business
- Chocolate manufacturers
- Integrity, equality and Simplicity.



# Quaker Decision Making

- Aligned with the Quaker Ethos
- Individually voice our opinions
- Mutual agreement
- Role of the Clerk

# Meeting for Clearness

- Help someone with a difficult decision or to reveal more insight into a particular situation
- Relaxed atmosphere of trust and confidentiality

# Implementing into School

## Quaker Decision Making

- School Forums (eg. School Council, College Forum)

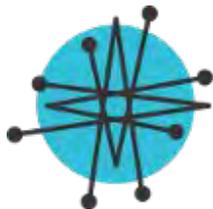
## Meeting for Clearness

- Pastoral Support System ( eg. Peer-mentoring, Form Tutors)





**Peace Jam**



# PEACEJAM

EST 1996



Education and  
Community  
Development



Alleviating Extreme  
Poverty



Protecting the  
Environment



Clean Water For  
Everyone



Non-proliferation &  
Disarmament



Human Rights For All



Ending Racism & Hate



Advancing Women and  
Children



Conflict Resolution



Global Health and  
Wellness

PeaceJam UK is part of an international youth movement led by Nobel Peace Prize winners.

The mission of the PeaceJam Foundation is to create young leaders committed to bringing about positive change through the inspiration of Nobel Peace Laureates who pass on the spirit, skills, and wisdom they embody.

PeaceJam is an international educational programme for young people aged 7-18. The participating Nobel Peace Laureates are directly involved in developing the PeaceJam curriculum and the programme itself. PeaceJam is the only organisation in the world that has so many Nobel Peace Laureates working together long-term for a common cause – developing leadership in young people.



SHIRIN EBADI



OSCAR ARIAS



JODY  
WILLIAMS



SIR JOSEPH  
ROTBLAT



JOSÉ RAMOS-  
HORTA



ALFRED  
NOBEL



LEYMAH  
GBOWEE



THE DALAI  
LAMA



BETTY  
WILLIAMS



RIGOBERTA  
MENCHÚ



DESMOND  
TUTU



MÁIREAD  
CORRIGAN



ADOLFO  
PÉREZ



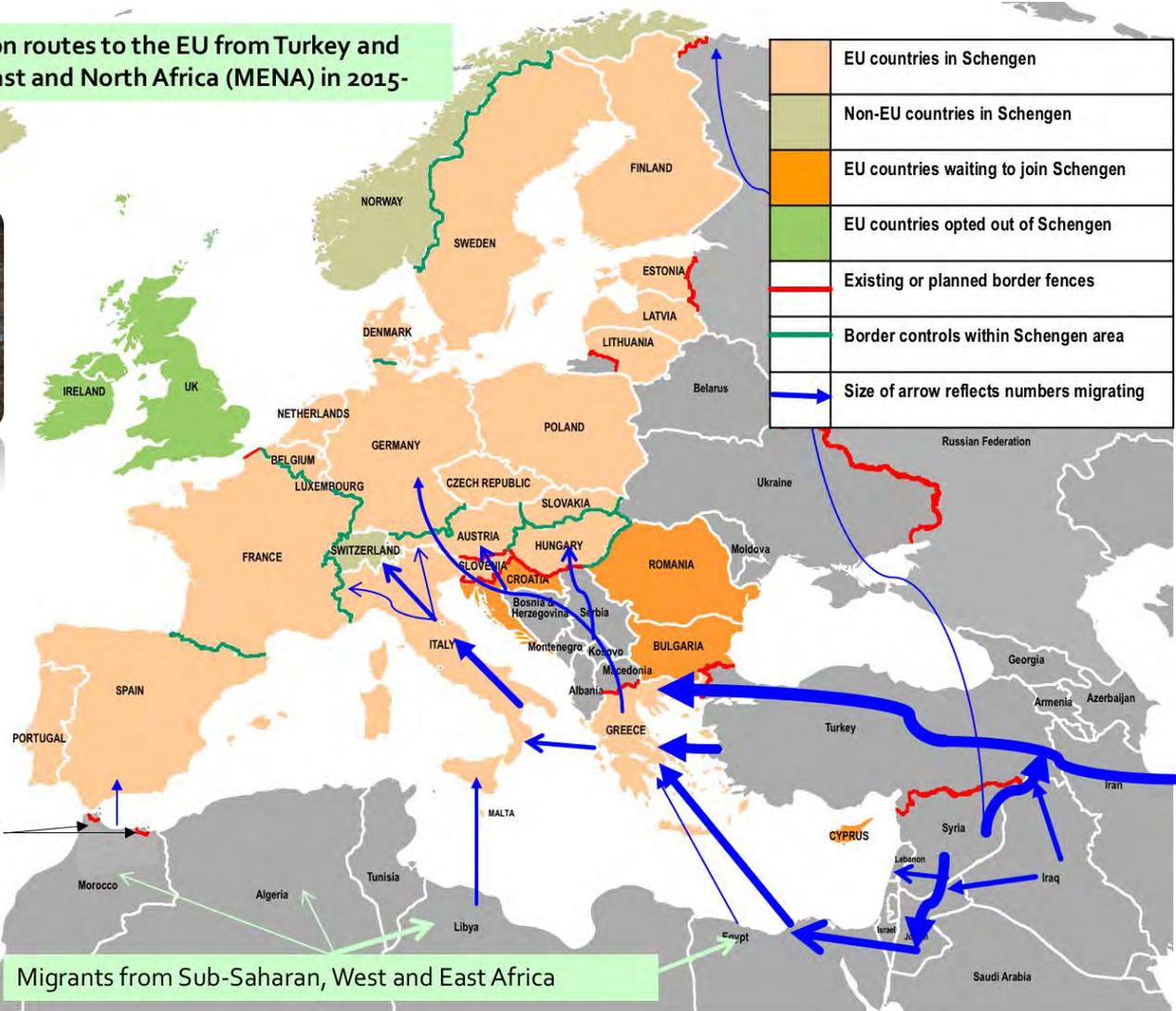


# Main migration routes to the EU from Turkey and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2015-2016.

ICELAND



Spanish enclaves of Ceuta & Melilla



Migrants from Sub-Saharan, West and East Africa





# THE LIFEBAG PROJECT



- Socks, underwear
- Hand sanitizer
- Toothbrush, toothpaste
- Liquid soap
- Hand towel
- Rain jacket
- Whistle
- Neck pillow
- Food bars (Granola bars)
- Reusable water bottles
- Notebooks, markers, pens
- Small game or toy (I.e. rubrics cube)
- Hat, scarf, gloves
- Little medical kit (I.e. plasters)
- Long lasting sugar treat (I.e. fudge, sweets)





**B.E.A.S.T**

**(Bootham Environmental And  
Sustainability Team)**

# B.E.A.S.T.

- Ambassadorial status
- Renegotiated zero landfill contract
- Organised Globe Day
- Introduced 'Portion Caution'
- New green space
- Maintained Bootham's Green flag for 7 years

Quakerism  
over the years



Swarthmoor  
Hall

Firbank  
Fell

Pendle Hill

Tapestry

# Summary of the Quaker Pilgrimage

Last week four Quaker Schools- Ackworth, The Mount, Bootham and Newtown came together to go on a Quaker Pilgrimage.

DAY ONE: visited Sawley Village Hall, and climbed Pendle Hill

DAY TWO: visited Swarthmoor Hall and Kendal Tapestry

DAY THREE: visited Firbank Fell, and joined in the meeting for worship at Brigflatts Meeting House

The aim of this trip was not only to gain a deeper understanding of the origin of Quakerism, but it was also a great opportunity for us to reflect on the meaning and significance of Quaker values.

# Sawley Village Hall

At Sawley Village Hall, we were given an introduction into the beliefs of the early Quakers, and how these beliefs have developed in Britain.



# Development of Quakerism

- Early belief that the Quaker silence was the one and only correct method of worship.
- Modern theme of accepting different beliefs has become a strong theme, which reinforces the idea of spiritual equality
- Quaker silence has become an opportunity for people of all backgrounds to find the spiritual truth which speaks to them individually.

# Acceptance

- We feel that the core value of acceptance contributes to the nurturing and supportive nature of our schools
- Students have the confidence to set up their own activities
- Specials Programme, with speakers from York Pride, Hull Homeless Community, Alcoholics Anonymous and The Retreat

# Pendle Hill



Notice  
Farm livestock  
Dogs must be kept  
on a lead

PENDLE HOUSE  
and  
PENDLESIDE  
FARM







SWARTHMOOR HALL



# Swarthmoor Hall

- A 16<sup>th</sup> century country house in Cumbria
- The 'Quaker Act'
- A haven to provide meetings for worship
- Played an integral role as the headquarters of the Quaker movement for the first few years
- Judge Thomas Fell and his wife Margaret Fell

# Quaker Tapestry

- Often compared with the Bayeux Tapestry
- Learnt about some of the interesting stories about different aspects of Quakerism from around the world
- A social community project carried out over a fifteen year period
- Enabled people to bring the stories of Quakerism to life through an unique form of art
- The 'Quaker' stitch



# QUAKER SCHOOLS

set up to instruct in whatsoever things were  
civil and useful in creation



Early  
schools were held  
in meetinghouses

# Firbank Fell

## LET YOUR LIVES SPEAK

HERE OR NEAR THIS ROCK GEORGE FOX PREACHED  
TO ABOUT ONE THOUSAND SEEKERS FOR THREE  
HOURS ON SUNDAY JUNE 13, 1652. GREAT POWER  
INSPIRED HIS MESSAGE AND THE MEETING PROVED  
OF FIRST IMPORTANCE IN GATHERING THE SOCIETY  
OF FRIENDS KNOWN AS QUAKERS. MANY MEN AND  
WOMEN CONVINCED OF THE TRUTH ON THIS FELL AND  
IN OTHER PARTS OF THE NORTHERN COUNTIES WENT  
NORTH THROUGH THE LAND AND OVER THE SEAS WITH  
THE LIVING WORD OF THE LORD ENDURING GREAT  
HARDSHIPS AND WINNING MULTITUDES TO CHRIST





# Brigflatts Meeting House



**And you couldn't have a 21st century school trip without a selfie!**



**Thanks for listening**

## **Summarising The Mount's Report to Quakers in Yorkshire: Saturday 15 October 2016**

Good morning Friends. This is my third Report to you on the life and times of The Mount School, the only girls Quaker School in Europe. It is an institution which can do wonderful work, and one which your own Mount School Committee is nurturing to do yet more, and new, wonderful, desirable Quaker Education work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's realities.

The Mount has had an interesting and exciting year since last we met. We have a new Principal, Adrienne Richmond, and a new Deputy Principal: Bridget Perks, and a new Business Manager, Helen Lambeth, whilst Rachel Capper continues as Head of The Mount Junior School. We continued the Mount tradition of having a portrait of our outgoing Principal, Julie Lodrick, placed in the Esther Tuke Room, following a successful appeal for funds.

Financially, 2014-15 was a challenging year, and led School Committee to set a firm budget and financial target of spending only within income, whilst using any small surplus to rebuild the School's working capital and reserves. 2015-16 started off in similar challenging mode. However, I can report that since January 2016 we have managed to live to Committee's financial target. This is due to the new executive team's diligence and sheer professionalism. They have built well on the foundations they were bequeathed. 2014-15 Annual Report & Accounts are available for your inspection. 2015-16 unaudited data shows a much improved picture.

The Mount's brave experiment with iPads in the Classroom has been a huge success with the girls, their parents and the teaching staff. We all have much to learn as new possibilities come along: however, learn we can with our new wifi enabled IT system. It is a real, new strength of the School.

School Committee recruited Adrienne Richmond as our next Principal, because she is an excellent and firm leader, a true education professional, and because she presented a powerful vision of The Mount under her leadership. Since January, besides learning the School, Adrienne has developed her vision, and spoke publicly about it at our Foundation, Leavers Prize Giving Day, in July.

Adrienne will be telling you more now, about how we can bring The Mount to the forefront in the education world's 21<sup>st</sup> Century circumstances. The vision requires refreshing and extending our buildings and facilities, and so requires us to do two really major things: Fundraise, and recycle some of our existing asset value within our balance Sheet. To these ends, we are creating The Mount School Foundation: it will be a separate Charity, devoted to The Mount's success. It will fundraise for new facilities, for Bursaries and for Awards and Prizes. It will absorb three small, historic charities, which will transfer their remaining funds to the Foundation. Secondly, we are exploring ways of making new, commercially profitable uses of the far end of the Playing Fields, which has road access and which is not used for Sports. Our plans are taking shape, and are being prepared for the definitive, Planning Permission granting stage. The new facilities we envisage will be enlarged on by Adrienne.

The School Pupils will make joint presentations of the Quaker nature of their education, as in previous years.

We are keen too that The Mount refreshes its links with the Quaker community, and I do ask you to help us do that. Please speak with Adrienne and me about how to move forward on this essential component.

It is worth noting that The Friends Schools Council, which is the collective body of all our Quaker Schools in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, this Autumn has started running a Project to explore

closer working opportunities between the UK Quaker Schools. To prepare for the Project, FSC held meetings with the Methodists and the Anglicans to understand how they organise their Schools, and to learn how they have come to be entrusted each with a chain of Tax funded Academy Schools as well. Quakers are far more decentralised in the running of our Schools than are the other denominations, and maybe we can learn better survival skills if we discover ways of closer cooperation. Certainly, organised as we are at present, we are in no state to be granted the privilege of running a chain of Tax funded Academy Schools.

Also, under our new leaderships, Bootham and The Mount are energetically seeking ever closer, practical ways of working together, because it seems such a sensible and obvious a thing for Quaker Schools in the same city to do!

Another collaborative endeavour which has moved forward since last year, has been FSC's connections with QVinE. We are using QVinE's excellent new Advices & Queries publication on Values and Ways in Quaker Education. FSC are in close contact with QVinE, so that Friends ministry to education generally may slowly, practically, lovingly, cease to be quite as harshly split in two as it has been for quite some years.

Friends, we can make the future a better place, if we put our minds and hearts and resources to it! The Mount is founded on Quaker faith, values and principles, and with your loving help, always will be a good exponent of living them, daily, in large things and small. Fidelis in Parvo is an apt motto!

Timothy Phillips  
Tuesday 20 September 2016.

Friends,

At the turn of the present year, it came as a shock to be asked to assume the role first as Deputy Clerk and then as Clerk to Bootham's General Committee. I had served previously as a committee member to what was then the Joint Committee of York's Friends' schools in the 1980s and, following my retirement as Head of the School of Social Sciences at Leeds Beckett University in 2011, I was appointed Governor to Bootham's General Committee. I was happy to be appointed because having just retired, I wanted to find a way of serving the Religious Society of Friends and this seemed to be an appropriate way of doing it. My sons had attended Bootham School in the 1980s and 1990s and the school had not only provided them with a sound education, but had played a major role in their spiritual and moral development. My love of the school is deep-rooted and the prospect of serving as a governor was appealing because it would enable me to make a contribution to the sterling work the school does in inculcating very evident Quaker values in young people from all over the world.

The previous Clerk to General Committee, Chris Petrie, had had to spend some time in hospital and his deputy, Patrick Gray, acted as Clerk in his absence. At that time, I was appointed Deputy Clerk. The fact that I live within walking distance of the school and could attend, if needed, immediately and at short notice, was central to my appointment.

When Patrick Gray decided to retire from General Committee and it became clear that we were to lose our Head teacher, Jonathan Taylor, and soon after our Bursar, Andy Woodland and our Treasurer, Alan Ashby, concerns were expressed that such a loss of key figures in the school's community would deplete the collective pool of expertise and could fracture the continuity of governance. The incoming Head, Chris Jeffrey, would inherit a situation which would be far from ideal. It was decided, therefore, that I should be appointed Clerk and afford some measure of continuity and support to Chris during his early years in post.

My Clerkship is therefore new and I am conscious of the vast amount of things that I should continue to learn to exercise that responsibility effectively and with due propriety. Like many independent schools in the North of England, our school faces difficulties and especially when it comes to recruitment, ever changing governmental educational policies, the possible introduction of grammar schools and uncertainty in the European and global markets. One wonders how many independent schools there will be in Yorkshire in ten years' time. But we have an additional difficulty in that the Religious Society of Friends who created us is now divided in its attitude towards the very notion of independent Quaker Schools. This is a pressing matter and it should be addressed and it should be addressed sooner rather than later and with courage and integrity.

Jonathan Taylor knew about facing difficulties. He guided the school skilfully and with good humour throughout his tenure of Headship and until his retirement at the end of the last academic year. For as long as Bootham exists we will owe him gratitude for his intelligent stewardship of the school and his calm reassuring ways. We wish him well in his retirement in Cornwall.

And we wish his successor, Chris Jeffrey, good fortune in the years ahead. Chris and his family are a great asset to the school. Chris and Carol are York graduates who know our city and love it. In the short time Chris has been with us he has taken to Bootham as a duck takes to water. He has gained

the respect and indeed, the affection of staff and governors. His enthusiasm to increase the joy of school life is palpable and infectious. I have every confidence in his judgement and the qualities of leadership he has brought to the school.

Indeed, I have confidence in our staff generally. It's worth reminding ourselves how lucky we are to have administrative, support and teaching staff who are in their various ways dedicated to the wellbeing of the school. In my visits to the school to listen to staff and learn about their activities, their ambitions and concerns, I have been hugely impressed by their commitment to the promotion of school life and the energy with which they pursue it. The majority of staff in the school are not members of the Religious Society of Friends, but I regard very many of them as Quakers. In some cases, their outlook on life, their values, their ways of being are indistinguishable from those I have encountered in local meetings. Their influence on the Bootham community is paramount.

And the Bootham community includes the Junior School as well as the Senior School. I have made it a priority to visit the Junior School regularly and to try and address some of the disjunctures that split site schools inevitably incur. A recent development for example has been an increased representation of Junior School staff on our Leadership Meeting and on General Committee.

Of course, the Junior School is a relatively recent development in the history of the school. For that reason references to it and structures for it being incorporated into the broader Bootham community are absent from our Articles of Association. The revision of these is long overdue and currently we have set up an Articles of Association Group to look into the matter, to suggest additions and revisions and to bring these to Quakers in Yorkshire as soon as it is prudent to do so.

Our sister school, The Mount, is also revising their Articles of Association. We have asked a governor from each school to work together and offer each other advice, insight and expertise to lend weight and where possible, harmony, to a revised document that can be considered by both General Committees. Our two schools have a long history of co-operation and in recent months the Clerks of both schools have met to discuss informally ways in which this co-operation might be maintained and enhanced.

This follows in the wake of an initiative taken by the Friends' Schools' Council to assess ways in which Friends' Schools in Britain and Ireland might explore new ways of establishing co-operative links and offering each other support.

I believe that Bootham School is fulfilling its role as an institution founded on Quaker principles and demonstrating Quaker values to the community it serves. We have a capable and likeable new Head, dedicated staff, effective governors and children who shine. We look to the future with confidence.

Stephen Sayers

Clerk

**The Mount Principal's Address to Quakers in Yorkshire**  
**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

Having been at The Mount for less than a year I am only a few months ahead of Chris in terms of understanding Quaker ways. Much, if not all of what Chris has said resonates with me. I have found the Quaker ethos and values to be extraordinary and they are very easy to sell to prospective parents as who wouldn't want their child to be brought up respecting and valuing every individual, living adventurously and trying to make a difference in an ever changing world?

The Mount is a fantastic place to work with Quaker values driving everything we do. Our pupils are a shining example of what living a Quaker ethos does to a young person. They are compassionate, understanding, kind, caring, tolerant and loving of one another. Our pupils are very watchful and protective of each another and look out for their fellow Mounties. They do not tolerate bullying and challenge any form of unkind behaviour.

We are a small school at The Mount with about 250 pupils but the huge advantage of this is that everyone knows one another extremely well. We are a big family where charity work and helping others is a mainstay of what we do in our day-to-day lives and social justice projects abound. Quakers have always not been frightened to stand up and be counted and our pupils are no different, as staff encourage them to do exactly that. You have seen from our girls what the PeaceJam curriculum brings to The Mount. I had never heard of the PeaceJam programme until I came here and now, I wouldn't want to be in a school that didn't have it, mainly because of PeaceJam's power to challenge young people's perceptions and empower them to change the world.

Empowering students to be themselves and to take action whenever they feel they should is what we do so well at The Mount. When girls leave Year 13 they are extremely well-equipped to take on the world and to go and live adventurously. Academic excellence at the Mount goes without saying; this summer all of our College II girls achieved the grades they needed to get to the universities of their choice. Our Head Girl secured a place to study Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the USA, an extremely prestigious university as many of you may well know, and one of the best in the world to study Engineering. Many others gained places at Russell group universities and we even had one girl gain a very coveted place to study a degree in Early Years Child Care at the famous Norland College.

So we encourage girls to aim high at The Mount with their career and life aspirations. The fact we are a small school makes it even more possible to give a disproportionate amount of time to each individual pupil, and we get to know our pupils extremely well as individuals. This is all, for me, supported by the Quaker ethos, with equality and respect for all as individuals and the belief that there is 'that of God in everyone', shining through in daily relationships and interactions between all members of The Mount community. Nothing is out of reach for any of our pupils. It simply is about the individual and the value-added that we can give every young person in our care, whatever their age and whatever they are striving to do.

So, what about the future for The Mount. As you can see we have the most superb school and fantastic grounds. As you may well know, the first Friends' Girls' School in York was founded by Esther Tuke in Trinity Lane in 1785 with the school moving to this site at The Mount, in 1856. I know that there is a huge responsibility resting on our shoulders to ensure that we are still here providing a Quaker education for girls, and now also for boys in our Junior School, in 2056 and beyond.

I announced to staff and parents at my Foundation Day Speech in July, that my vision is to grow the school and invest in its facilities. One thing we lack here is a purpose built dance/drama studio and we have plans to build such a studio on the side of this very hall as part of a three phase development of this area of the School. The project would also see the refurbishment of this hall and the music block to create a Performing Arts hub at the centre of the school, a facility to be used not only by our Junior School and Senior School but also shared publicly with the wider York community. As well as developing a new Performing Arts hub we will at the same time be embarking upon upgrading our sports facilities, including the swimming pool, and refurbishing the Science laboratories.

We will of course be looking for the help and support of QiY as we begin to fundraise for this new venture. We are on the cusp of creating The Mount School Foundation which will be the main vehicle for fundraising activity and managing the investment of the bursary fund as well as the site development fund. As owners of the School I would like to offer an open invitation to you all to come and visit The Mount when the pupils are here so that you can see the school thriving and in session. We are a vibrant and welcoming community and I am very much looking forward to embracing the challenges and opportunities that the next few years may bring as The Mount School moves forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Adrienne Richmond  
Principal  
The Mount School York

## **Head of Bootham School's talk to Quakers in Yorkshire**

**15 October 2016**

Good Morning, Friends

It's a pleasure and a privilege to stand before you this morning for the first time as the Head of Bootham School. Thank you for your welcome and for allowing the opportunity to talk to you today.

I imagine it must be quite unusual for both Bootham and The Mount to have new Heads in the same year, and thus or both to be attending their first meeting of Quakers in Yorkshire together. So Adrienne and I have agreed that we would offer you some brief observations about our first encounters with Quaker education and our first impressions of our school. We agreed also that, as the newest member of the duo (if only by two terms), I should go first, and that -with only just over 5 weeks under my belt at my school- I would attempt to take a fairly general approach; while Adrienne is going to talk more specifically about her experience as a newcomer at The Mount, much of which will have mirrored my own. I hope to be able to have caught up by this time next year!

-#-

There is one phrase that I have heard more often than any other from friends, colleagues, pupils and their parents over the past year or so as I have explained to them a little of my growing understanding of the practices, priorities and personality of a Quaker school.

"I really like the sound of that"!

This typical reaction, as well as my own preparation and exploration, has helped me begin to see what the practices and tenets of Quakerism have to offer to both education and society, and a little of how they can address its needs and emerging priorities. I have been stuck, time and again, by the resonance my discussions of such things has had with those to whom I have spoken.

Why? Well let's start by speaking a little truth about -if not to- power.

Government's claims to want to develop an education broader than that permitted by its ridiculous national testing regime, ring increasingly hollow. In contrast, the key themes emerging among what might be termed 'real educators' centre around the building of character, the development of resilience, the tackling of the alarming growth of mental health issues, the proportionate and truly productive use of modern information technology, and the tailoring of 'the system' to truly meet the needs of all individuals. The principles, attitudes and practices of Quakerism have so much to offer to the discussion in all these areas.

For example, there is a rapidly growing body of research cited by those who rightly advocate that education should primarily be concentrating on setting up young people to truly flourish in life (intellectually, mentally emotionally and spiritually) and not just on testing narrow academic achievement. This research points to the importance in a fruitful life of becoming open to identifying the large and small blessings of one's existence; of discovering one's unique combination of talents and attributes -that of God in each of us, as it were- and putting these at the disposal of a just cause or a bigger idea; of the necessity to human happiness of service to others; of the benefits of human connection in community; and our need for stillness and mindful silence.

Indeed, I recently heard Martin Seligman, dubbed The Father of Positive Psychology, urging his audience to develop a way of experiencing mindful silence *in connection with others* rather than as a solitary practice...the fact that he was speaking at the HQ of British Quakerism in Euston at the time was an irony that struck me very forcibly indeed!

A Quaker education offers all these things as standard, and has been doing so for many years...it's no new discovery or fad! But it is 'of the moment', and we know how to do it.

I have also spoken to many people who want to know a bit about Quakerism more generally and why I was attracted to it. Most, a little like I was initially, had some alarming misconceptions: my own two sons, now in their twenties have been teasing my daughter (who has just entered College 1 at Bootham) about the fact that she won't be permitted to speak in public for two years; that she will have to dress like the Amish and eat porridge. And that she'll be expected to chain herself to the railings of some military establishment or other on a termly basis! Their mischievously deployed caricatures found resonance in the preconceptions of those 'many people' I have just mentioned...very few had any conception of modern Quaker life and practice.

When I tried to explain what I was discovering for myself as I prepared for Bootham, interest was piqued and eyes lit up. This was particularly true of those who, as young people, had enjoyed a sincere and active Christian experience. Many had drifted from it or were [guiltily] reluctant to revisit it, often because of concerns about doctrinal inflexibility, moral conservatism or emotionally demonstrative worship It's where I find myself in my own spiritual journey in very many ways.

The active silence and stillness of Quakerism; its eschewing of doctrinal rigidity; its emphasis of each individual 'listening to the light' for her or himself; of encountering God directly in community with others; and of being open to turn all that into social action: those I spoke to seemed hugely intrigued, even excited. My experience of Bootham in reality and daily practice over less than half a term has served to increase my excitement about such things, the challenge they offer and the response they elicit from many of the young people in the school.

So, whether one considers Quaker education in particular, or the Quaker way of living and being more generally, as a newcomer I perceive that both have a huge amount to offer to those searching for a really authentic and 'modern' approach to the particular challenges of our day and age. No wonder so many people I have met in school and outside- have responded with 'I really like the sound of that: it's just what I'm looking for!'"

In that regard, it is an enormous privilege to have been asked to lead a community which holds these things dear; to introduce generations of fine young people to the joys, benefits and significant responsibilities of the Quaker way, and to see it lived out on a daily basis in the school.

I'm excited to find out more!

Chris Jeffery

15 October 2016

## QIY – York Human Rights City Network

### A talk by Stephen Pittam - Saturday 15 October 2016

- 1 Thank you for the invitation to address this QIY meeting today. When Chris Love spoke to me about speaking she gave me a wide ranging brief as is referred to in the programme: from talking about my engagement with Northern Ireland; or Quaker Service in the Palestinian refugee camps, or about other social justice work I have been engaged with, particularly through my working life with the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. That felt a little too broad, so I suggested that we might focus down a little onto a theme that has been common to all those activities and on which I am now actively engaged – that of human rights and particularly how the broad principles of human rights might apply at a local level. And even more particularly - how they might apply here in the city of York.
- 2 This is one key part of the portfolio of activities I have somehow accumulated since I retired in 2012. It is not the only part, but for me it is an important part. I felt honoured to be invited to join the Board of Trustees of the British Institute of Human Rights in 2013. So I am connected to the national debate on human rights at this challenging time. But the focus of what I want to talk about is more on the local level in relation to the York Human Rights City Network. I Chair the Steering Group of this new initiative.
- 3 But before that I want to talk about Quakers and Human Rights. Quakers have worked actively for human rights from far before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved in 1948 or the European Convention of Human Rights was passed in 1950. The British Institute of Human Rights has a lovely image of a tree depicting human rights. Its roots are firmly embedded in ancient philosophy, religion and the struggles of many social movements. Its trunk is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – still considered to be the most important human rights document. Its two main branches are civil & political rights, and social & economic rights – the two key groupings of rights. Its fruits are the laws that implement the rights covering specific themes or groups.
- 4 The Quaker experience is part of the roots of the human rights tree. Quakers have always worked actively for human rights as they flow naturally from our testimonies, particularly on peace and equality. QPSW and especially QUNO work at all levels from the grassroots to the international to support the promotion and protection of human rights.
- 5 Human rights are based on the principle that we all have them – they belong to everyone because we are human. They represent what is important to us to flourish as human beings. They define a set of shared values. They cover many aspects of every-day life ranging from the rights to food, shelter, education and health to freedom of thought, religion and expression. They require that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, and yes this includes people unpopular in society like those accused of terrorist offences, in prison or advocating for unpopular causes. They apply to us all but they are particularly important for those who are disempowered or disadvantaged.

- 6 We should be proud of the fact that our country has been at the forefront of efforts to promote human rights globally – it was a Conservative lawyer who was the principle author of the European Convention on Human Rights. Equally we should feel shame that our current government will during the next year be aiming to repeal our very own Human Rights Act - the domestic law that brings the rights enshrined in that European Convention home for everyone living in Britain. We are promised a British Bill of Rights but this will definitely be a weaker instrument, possibly only giving rights to British citizens. If the Act is repealed it will be the first time in history that a human rights law has been repealed anywhere in the world. For those of us residing in the UK it will undermine the universal nature of human rights. We need to be alert to what is happening.
- 7 Why is this happening? Well there are many reasons but foremost amongst them is that people do not understand human rights. We have always looked at human rights as being 'out there'. They are to do with far off places and how other governments operate. They are not for us. In 2013 when the UK Government was campaigning at the United Nations to be elected onto the UN Human Rights Council the Foreign Office declared that the UK is a 'passionate, committed and effective defender of human rights'. The very same week Theresa May, as Home Secretary, was announcing her intention to repeal the Human Rights Act. It is hard to imagine a clearer example of the sense that human rights are for others and not for us.
- 8 But this sense that human rights are not for us goes beyond how governments think. This brings me onto what is happening in York. In my opinion a jewel of the University of York, and of our city, is the Centre for Applied Human Rights. We are so fortunate to have this Centre here in York. Each year the Centre offers fellowships to up to ten human rights defenders from all over the world who come for the purposes of research, networking and rest from their difficult working environments. One thing they are encouraged to do is to find voluntary organisations in and around York working on similar issues to theirs. Regularly the Defenders come back from their visits commenting on how issues which they would frame as human rights issues like work on domestic violence, homelessness or disability, are not seen in this way by local organisations in York. A human rights framework is little understood.
- 9 York is also the home of the only UK overseas volunteering agency that is not based in London. International Service (perhaps better known to some as UNAIS – the United Nations Association International Service) operates its overseas volunteering programme firmly within a framework of human rights. For many years it ran a Human Rights Award Scheme whereby its partner organisations across the world were able to nominate human rights defenders for a series of awards all given out at a ceremony held in the Houses of Parliament. In 2012 IS decided it would like to hold this ceremony in York, and Archbishop Sentamu was keen to offer the Minster. In discussions with the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust about supporting this venture the idea emerged of matching each of the international awards offered with a UK award. IS found no difficulty attracting nominations from all around the world for the international awards. It struggled hugely to find nominations from the UK. People working on a range of social justice issues in our country just

didn't see themselves as human rights defenders.

- 10 York is also home to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. JRCT has supported human rights work in the UK for many years. Initially this focus came out of the Trust's concern for our democracy. The Trust saw human rights as a cornerstone of a democratic and fair society, providing the rule book for governments to ensure that each person is treated with dignity and respect in their daily life. The Trust funded most of the national organisations which campaigned for the 1998 Human Rights Act. In fact when Jack Straw announced he was setting up a panel to help implement the Act, every member of the panel was a JRCT grantee. But the Labour government failed to implement one key aspect of the campaign for the Act. That was that there should be a well-funded Human Rights Commission which would have an outreach and educational role about human rights. The government provided relatively generous training for the legal sector, but nothing for civil society. Eventually a Human Rights Commission was added onto the Equality Commission in 2007 but ever since, this body has faced deep cuts and its impact on promoting human rights and an understanding of why they are important has been much less than hoped for. So we are faced with a situation where human rights are seen to be the concern of a few and not relevant to people's everyday lives.
- 11 I have focussed on these three York based organisations because it has been from them that the initiative for the York Human Rights City initiative emerged. And here I have to be careful! The JRCT is a funder, and hasn't been institutionally involved. My involvement has always been a personal one based on the knowledge and experience gained from my work with JRCT. JRCT and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have both offered financial support to the initiative but they are not institutionally involved.
- 12 So the story of the York Human Rights City Network starts when Paul Gready, the Professor and Director of the Centre for Applied Human Rights at York University, invited the then Director of International Service and myself to a meeting to think about whether it may be possible to change the discourse on human rights to one which was more locally focused, and which gave an emphasis to how human rights apply to the everyday concerns of people at the City level.
- 13 We identified that York has a tradition of democratic innovation (the 1212 Royal Charter was in our minds at the time and the York Fairness Commission); it has a history of philanthropy which has helped to shape local and national debates; it has a strong tradition of faith in the city through many different religious communities; and it has a sense of internationalism informed by tourism, the chocolate industry and the two universities.
- 14 Paul discovered that there is a growing movement around the world of cities who have declared themselves as Human Rights Cities. The movement defines a Human Rights City as 'a community where people of goodwill in government, in organisations and in institutions use a human rights framework to guide the development of the life of the community. Equality and non-discrimination are basic values, as is a gender perspective. Efforts are made to promote a holistic vision of human rights to overcome fear and impoverishment, and build a society that provides human security, access to

food, clean water, housing, education , healthcare and work at liveable wages for all – not as a gift but as a realisation of human rights.'

15 Cities in Africa, South America, North America and in Europe have declared themselves to be Human Rights Cities. In Europe we have The Hague and Utrecht in the Netherlands, Graz in Austria and Barcelona in Spain. There is no human rights city in the UK. So we have declared our ambition for York to become the first Human Rights city in the UK. And we are preparing to launch as such in 2017. Our aim is to use the framing of human rights to provide a link from the local to the global.

16 We have established a Steering Group to oversee the network which is representative of different sectors. The Network is jointly sponsored by York Council for Voluntary Service and the University Centre for Applied Human Rights. The Steering Group currently comprises representatives from York City Council, the Commander of the York division of the Police, representatives of York CVS and York CAB, The York City of Sanctuary Movement and of course the Centre for Applied Human Rights and International Service. We have links to many other organisations and networks.

17 Our vision is:

**York as a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe city built on the foundations of universal human rights; and as a city that reaches out and links with the wider human rights community striving for similar outcomes at national, European and global levels**

18 Our objectives are:

- to encourage practitioners and policy-makers at a City level to use human rights law and principles to guide their work;
- to raise public awareness and generate debate about human rights issues through the arranging of public events;
- to mobilise human rights to provide protection for vulnerable groups, both locally and as a form of international solidarity - such groups include homeless people, women subject to violence, asylum seekers and refugees and international human rights defenders at risk.

19 So what have we done:

- Well we started with a participative Research Project to get an idea of the five rights which people in York think are most important to them. MA students went out into York to ask residents on the streets their views, we organised an on-line survey and we asked a wide range of voluntary organisations for their views. The five rights that were selected by York residents were education, non-discrimination and equality, health, an adequate standard of living, and housing.
- Indicators - we have developed a set of indicators by which we can monitor these five rights. Our first report on the state of York's human rights health will be launched on 10 December 2016 – Human Rights Day.
- Opinionate – working with the wonderful Helen Snelson of the Mount School,

we have joined with the Independent State School Partnership on arranging a series of workshops primarily for sixth-formers, but younger pupils too, from York schools on human rights issues.

- Holocaust Memorial Day - YHRCN offered support and provided speakers for the 'Assemblies' project' during the week of events to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in 2016. This initiative raised awareness about the Holocaust and more contemporary human rights issues and reached more than 2000 young people in the Yorkshire region.
  - Film Festival – The Masters students at CAHR have organised an annual human rights Film Festival. In March 2016 the festival entitled Borders & Boundaries, encompassed the screening of seven documentary films in venues ranging from a pub to Kings Manor. Connected to the festival was a Photography Project organised with Refugee Action York, a short film produced by the Human Rights Defenders on the CAHR Fellowship Scheme here in York, and a York Human Rights City Tour.
  - The Refugee Crisis - As the refugee crisis deepened in the summer of 2015, YHRCN found itself at the centre of the response in York. Our co-ordinator mobilised partner organisations like Refugee Action York, City of Sanctuary, York Minster and York Mosque and was at the centre of the 07 September 2015 York Welcomes Refugees march and rally.
  - Training – we have brought the British Institute of Human Rights to York for two successful training days on human rights, first with more than 20 senior managers of the City of York Council and the second with voluntary sector leaders. Both seminars focused on the York Indicator project and the Human Rights Act. The participants were inspired by the opportunity to learn about a human rights framework, but craved for more support for thinking about how this can apply to their work.
  - Hate Crime – we organised a day long workshop on 'hate crime' at the request of North Yorkshire Police and in partnership with York Racial Equality Network. The event was attended by a range of council staff, local businesses, residents and community groups. The day focussed on conceptualising a new hate crime strategy for North Yorkshire.
  - We organised a successful international workshop last January on The Rise of Human Rights Cities. We brought people from Utrecht, Graz and Dublin as well as from 5 other UK cities to explore the potential of human rights cities.
  - We have hosted the visit of a group of local and national politicians from the Netherlands interested in what York is doing.
- 20 I would like to acknowledge the support that we have received from JRCT and JRF and from New Earswick Local Meeting (my local meeting which has offered financial support).
- 21 I would also like to say that I can understand if York Friends present today will be surprised by a lot of what I have said. They may not have heard a lot about this. I have talked about the Network's achievements rather than our challenges. Amongst these have been a minimal staff presence and the burn out of our first excellent worker. We now have a new co-ordinator, Heidi Chan, who will be focussing more on communications and getting the

message across. We have a new website and are beginning to get regular mailings out. I would encourage anyone interested to register with us at [www.yhrcn.org](http://www.yhrcn.org).

- 22 But in ending, I want to emphasise that what we are doing here in York is long term work. We are trying to build a positive culture of human rights from the bottom up. Our motivation has come from a deep concern about the way human rights are currently portrayed in our country. Some politicians and much of the media are virulently hostile to human rights.
- 23 Our Human Rights Act is under threat. I say our Human Rights Act because it is just that. It is one of the few instruments we have to hold the government and those in authority to account. Only yesterday it was in the news that the family of Sean Benton had used the Human Rights Act to secure a proper inquest into Sean's death in Deepcut Barracks 20 years ago. It was the Human Rights Act which allowed the families of the Hillsborough Disaster in Sheffield to gain a proper inquest and public inquiry into the death of their loved ones. It was the Human Rights Act which allowed for the proper investigation into the appalling treatment received by patients at the Mid-Staffordshire hospital. These are the headline cases – every day the Act is being used to shine a spotlight on everyday issues such as poor treatment of older people; the rights of disabled people to live independently; and the missed opportunities for children living in poverty. Our Human Rights Act is under threat. Our current government is committed to repealing it, although they are struggling to work out how they can do this. We need to be alert. We need to be vocal in its support.

Stephen Pittam 15 October 2016