

# Minutes of a meeting of Quakers in Yorkshire

Held at Huddersfield Friends Meeting House on 16 April 2016

## Representatives

A complete list is not yet available.

### **QiY 16/04/01      Reading**

In our opening worship we have heard a reading of the poem 'To my daughter Betty, the Gift of God' by Tom Kettle, an Irish barrister who lost his life on the Western Front in 1916 four days after writing the poem.

### **QiY 16/04/02      Testimony**

We have heard read a testimony to the grace of God in the life of our Friend Cedric Shaw which was accepted by Pickering and Hull Area Meeting on 13 December 2015.

### **QiY 16/04/03      Welcome**

We have been welcomed to Huddersfield Meeting House by Helen Brockley on behalf of Brighouse West Yorkshire Area Meeting.

### **QiY 16/04/04      Elder**

We thank Anne Bettys of Huddersfield Local Meeting for offering to serve as Elder for today's meeting.

### **QiY 16/04/05      Performance of *Over the Top* by Journeymen Theatre**

We have enjoyed an inspiring performance of *Over the Top*, a play written and performed by Lynn and Dave Morris. This piece was commissioned by West Midlands Quaker Peace Committee in response to the increasing influence of military values in everyday life, especially in education. The play is designed to be performed in schools and features a debate between a school head and a widowed parent anxious to counter in some measure the government's militarizing agenda.

The play reflects vividly the effects on a family of a father's death as an army padre in the Iraq wars. In schools where there is time students can engage in the discussion between the characters of Dylan and his mother.

Friends have commented on the insidious, persuasive, slick nature of the material taken into schools, and the possibility that the Government's 'military creep' is in breach of the rights of the child. We are being made aware that through the publicity accorded to such initiatives as Help for Heroes the presence of the military is being made increasingly acceptable in normal civilian life. This initiative is very powerful and there is little public awareness of the scale of it.

During tours to schools, the teachers have not always received the play warmly. Lynn and Dave have been able to see at first hand how the Prevent Strategy works in schools, where staff monitor every comment made by the young people. Hence the young people are encouraged to say what will be acceptable to the teachers rather than express their views. Few young people want to join up, they want peace,

they do not want to hear about war.

We have considered the enormous numbers of casualties in the Second World War and the two years following, and we have been reminded of the dangerous narrative that conflict created for our national mythology.

If we are get the messages out to the public we need to use the technology so that the message can reach younger people. Could the move to the creation of academies limit the opportunities for parents to resist the process of militarisation? We are receiving from government distorted messages about British values, and we must work to challenge the mixed and contradictory ideas that we are hearing. Are there ways in which we can make curriculum change that will counter the present trend?

We have been informed and moved by this powerful, moving piece, and we are grateful to Journeymen Theatre for coming and sharing their work with us, and for responding to our questions.

## **QiY 16/01/06          Releases and Appointments**

### **RELEASES**

Ann Blezard has asked to be released as a member of the Arrangements Committee.

Roy Love has asked to be released as a Governor of Breckenbrough School.

We agree to these requests and thank the Friends for their service.

### **APPOINTMENTS**

Nominations for appointment are brought to us as follows.

From Brighouse West Yorkshire Area meeting

#### **QiY Trustees**

Andrea Killen (Halifax) to serve a further year as a Trustee from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016.

From QiY Nominations Committee

#### **The Mount School Committee**

Katharine Rowntree (Friargate) to serve a second full term on The Mount School Committee from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2019.

Mary Young (Attender at Friargate) to serve a first term on The Mount School Committee from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2019.

#### **West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council**

Rachel Muers (Carlton Hill) to serve as a Church Leader at the West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2018. (Confirmation of appointment made between meetings.)

## From Under 19s Coordinating Group

### **Safeguarding Coordinators**

Madeleine Kay (Friargate) to serve as Safeguarding Co-ordinator for Easter Settlement, Junior Holidays and Yorkshire Friends Holiday School from 1 January to 31 December 2016 (second appointment).

Helen Orme (Settle) to serve a first term as Safeguarding Co-ordinator for Easter Settlement, Junior Holidays and Yorkshire Friends Holiday School from 16 April 2016 – 31 December 2018.

These names being acceptable, the Friends are duly appointed. We thank these Friends for their willingness to serve.

### **QiY 16/01/07      Taking Action, Peace Education and Veterans for Peace**

This afternoon we have welcomed three guest speakers: from Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) Sam Walton, Peace & Disarmament Programme Manager and Isabel (Izzy) Cartwright, Peace Education Programme Manager; and from Veterans for Peace (VfP) John Bourton, accompanied by Mike Elstub. They have helped us continue our consideration of the morning's topic and gave short introductions about their work before we saw the video *The Unseen March*.

Workshops entitled 'Taking Action', 'Peace Education' and 'Veterans for Peace' enabled us to focus in smaller groups on different aspects. On reconvening, we heard from a representative of each workshop one thing they had learned and one action that we could take.

Sam stated that the increasing militarism in society was highlighted by a number of Quaker meetings some years ago, which prompted QPSW to focus on this issue at a time when Forces Watch and Veterans for Peace were also trying to respond. His report *The New Tide of Militarisation* originated from an understanding that the government perceived a gap between military and civil society so decided to undertake a public relations initiative to support the military. Sam identified Armed Forces Day as part of a government strategy to militarise society and illustrated how military participation in education is a key strand of their policy. The overall objective is to ensure that our country is ready to go to war. In the workshop he facilitated, Sam helped Friends to explore action that can be taken to challenge it. In feedback we heard that the group had learned that though war is unpopular, the government and society in general want the army to be popular. This workshop split into three groups. Most people were unaware of subtle tactics used to make Armed Forces Day a national event. This might become the focus for some action. Suggestions included organising a conflict resolution day; learning about Scientists for Social Responsibility; setting up local campaigns against the arms trade. We were asked to let QPSW know what initiatives were taken.

Izzy advised that militarisation has been managed from central rather than local government in the last few years. Examples of different government initiatives in education in support of militarisation include *Troops to Teachers*, which has not yet resulted in many recruits, and the spread of *Cadets* to state schools and colleges. £50m was pledged in the 2015 Budget to introduce *Cadet Corps*. Companies in the

arms industry can influence the school curriculum and the use of arms to solve conflicts is becoming the norm. She acknowledged the difficulty in challenging this but assured us that small actions can be successful. For example, a parent objected to a school project promoting the armed forces by going to the head teacher, after which the project was dropped. There are signs of encouragement for peace work. QPSW has received requests for resources from all kinds of young peoples' groups and one of the organisations which run Academies has now adopted peace education as part of its ethos in its schools. Support is vital for organisations such as Veterans for Peace whose members have a unique insight.

In her workshop, Izzy shared some peace education materials that can be used and explained how QPSW approaches its work with young people. Asked to consider what a peaceful school would look like, Friends suggested there would opportunities for children to make decisions, child-led activities and teamwork amongst other characteristics. If you know of any children in school see if they can use QPSW's *Teach Peace Pack* and *Fly Kites not Drones*.

John gave a history of Veterans for Peace which originated in the USA and started in the UK in 2011. All its 380 members have been in the armed forces. They aim to educate young people about the unknown consequences of military action, to highlight elements of military training and the military mind set and to support other peace activists. They are especially concerned about the recruitment of 16 year olds. Using social media and the Internet are vital for their work, as ex personnel are widely spread; they are now establishing local branches. His workshop enabled Friends to hear from him and Mike Elstub, another VfP member, about their journeys from the armed forces to peace activism. Friends learned about the seductiveness with which young people are enrolled into the armed forces, with vulnerable, poor, young people (including primary age) being targeted. The key task identified was to try and get Veterans for Peace into schools.

We thank our speakers for their stimulating and thoughtful presentations and the way in which we have been patiently encouraged to consider what we can do, however, small.

### **QiY 16/01/08      Closing Minute**

We have spent the day together focusing on a major concern, militarisation and its relationship to our faith and witness in the world. We feel energised. Our meeting today has been enriched by the presence of children and we thank the Friends who have been involved with their care. We also thank Friends in Huddersfield meeting for the efforts they have made to help the co-clerks organise all the sessions, and for hosting us. We look forward to our next meeting, at Ilkley on Saturday 16 July 2016, God willing.

Chris Love  
Arthur Pritchard  
Co Clerks to Quakers in Yorkshire