

## Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Michael Bliss

12<sup>th</sup> January 1932 to 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2023

Michael led a long and active life, which was one of energy, enthusiasm and had several strands running through it. These included Ackworth School, active service to Quakers, a love of New Zealand and the companionship of his wife of nearly 67 years, Marjorie.

Michael was a man of principle and with a strong belief in what he felt was right and how this fitted with his view of right ordering. Alongside this was a gentler, caring side which was shown in the warmth with which he spoke about New Zealand, his family and especially his grandchildren.

Michael's Quaker life started at Ackworth School where he met Marjorie, and he remained involved with the school later serving on its Governing Committee and enjoying his and Marjorie's role as joint Presidents of the Ackworth Old Scholars' Association in their later years. He chose to become a member of the Religious Society of Friends as an adult, but after he had already been able to register as a conscientious objector, and avoid National Service in the armed forces. It was at this time Michael began his work in forestry. He often said he had not wanted to be automatically exempted because he was a Quaker. Michael's pacifist principles were a core part of his adult life.

Michael's commitment to Quakers was a living one of active service. He valued Friends who offered service and gave of himself whether it be to Wakefield and Pickering Local Meetings or Pontefract Monthly Meeting and Pickering and Hull Area Meeting. Michael served Friends as an Elder, a Clerk and convenors of premises groups, as well as times of being a Treasurer. He served the wider family of Friends by being on Woodbrooke Council and the Swarthmore Lecture Committee. Michael brought enthusiasm and vigour to his service, and was a stickler for detail, so much so that when overseeing the retiling of Pickering Quaker Meeting House he insisted on going up the scaffold to the roof whilst in his late 70s. It was to his local Meetings that he appeared most attached, and would attend with unwavering regularity. He was undeniably a faithful Friend. His ministry was thoughtful and softly spoken. His contributions to Business Meetings came from a place of wanting to hold on to Quaker principles and beliefs which had been embedded in him over eight decades. Sometimes a gentler approach to embracing new ideas would have been appreciated by other Friends.

The significance of the opportunities he had to meet with, and work for, Friends in New Zealand is not lost on anyone who found themselves in conversation with him in the last 20 years of his life. He appreciated the esteem New Zealand Friends had for him, following his two periods of service as a Resident Friend in Auckland. This was an important formative time for Michael as he was searching for acceptance by others having had to take retirement from his forestry role. This time of affirmation became the focus of much of the last decades of his life, with a love of all things New Zealand – from flowers and fauna to All Black Rugby Teams, from native Maori songs to Quaker Zoom Meetings for Worship with Auckland Friends. The continued opportunities to travel and visit Friends in New Zealand energised him for many years.

Michael's other great love was Marjorie and the family that they created. It always was Michael and Marjorie and even when his interests took him away from her, as a pot holer, a canoeist, an occasional poet, a hill walker and a Leicester City Fan you were always aware that his love for Marjorie was a constant. In a small community, their very strong, steadfast presence and commitment could be overwhelming for others at times, which leaves a great gap now that they have both passed away.

Michael was a man with a presence, a generous smile and flowing silvery white locks even in his 90s. Michael was a good Friend who retained a curiosity about life and for whom being a part of the Quaker Community was so important. Michael was also a forthright, principled Friend. He was a man of integrity who was at times hard to get to know and love, but a man with a strong Quaker voice, which many can still hear.

In giving thanks for the Grace of God as shown in his life it is helpful to return to one of Michael's most loved quotes from Isaac Pennington (Quaker Faith and Practice 10.01)

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another: but praying for one another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

John Lawson

June 2024