

Craven & Keighley Area Meeting Newsletter

Autumn 2014

The tardiness of this winter newsletter reflects the lethargy I usually feel when overtaken by customary winter habits. Mike and I are normally health-conscious, but at this time of year we crave starchy, salty and sweet foods, despite the green vegetables from the allotment filling half the fridge. Vibrant personal energy levels are not encouraged by central heating, with its tendency to dry the air and render one's inner weatherproof resources lazy. A relative of mine who only has her front room warmed by the low setting on her gas fire, reckons we've gone "soft" from using day-long central heating. Generations before her must have had far clearer heads than some of us. Never mind...in a few days we will be in Spain for a week, the first time we've flown in 12 years!

I apologise for the fact that this edition seems dominated by Settle LM. Publishable news doesn't always arise in a balanced fashion, and sometimes you have to use what comes your way. A quick hint: when looking at the photo of the sheep on the back page, use a magnifying glass to intensify the comic effect.

Pam Elstub

Settle's roof

In common with our other older meeting houses, Settle's roof needs regular attention. In 1732 it was minuted *'Wm. Birkbeck Sen. and Thos. Carr is Appointed to get some of ye most necessary places on ye Roofe of ye Meeting house stopt with Moss & wt. Other things they think proper to be done in order to Repair it so as it may put on as until a later spring & also to see if anything Can be done to prevent ye Raining into ye Stable & to do it also.'*

Well, it now needs to be 'stopt' again, but this time we plan to use more than moss! The need for repairs was forecast in 2002 when a full structural survey was carried out prior to the building of the new extension. In 2014 we started to get small leaks when wind and rain conspired together and, just as in 1732, the cause was not the stone slates themselves but the felting which had perished.

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Through 2014 Settle's Premises Committee has been busy getting quotations, appointing James Innerdale as architect, negotiating with Craven Council, advising Area Meeting and, most importantly, securing funds to pay for the repairs. The main points are:

- Budgeted cost is £29,582.
- We are under-boarding the roof with ply as well as felt to improve durability.
- Area Meeting has minuted full support for the work (it is your building, Friends!).
- Settle Friends have so far raised £8,600, although part of this has had to be spent on replacing essential plumbing in Quaker Garth.
- We have secured a £20,000 grant from the Lafarge –Tarmac Limited Landfill Communities Fund, backed by a balancing grant from the Meeting Houses Fund to Lafarge of £2,198.
- As a listed building we hope to secure refund of our VAT through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

The work is planned to start in April so, should you see Settle Meeting House shrouded in scaffolding, you will know that we are continuing to be faithful to the legacy left by those Friends who 'stopt ye Roofe of ye Meeting house' all those years ago.

John Asher Settle Local Meeting

The Threat of TTIP

The above four letters comprise one of those annoying abbreviations that sound strange and possibly can be ignored as “youth-speak”, rather like LOL. Or so I thought until very recently. There are in fact very important letters, representing a concept currently being discussed by EU bureaucrats, and which, in my opinion, could change all our lives for the worse. The letters stand for Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. A two-year-old discussion has been happening behind closed doors between the EU and the USA, with the intention of removing red tape to ensure better trade between transatlantic corporations. This sounds quite above-board, but why the secrecy? My impression is that we have perfectly good free trade arrangements already between the UK and the USA.

It turns out that we in the EU have much stronger legislation to protect the public than they have in the USA, and distinctly different Environmental Protection laws. This means that American corporations that wish to trade over here have to comply with our laws, a factor that can be deleterious to their profits. As a consequence these American corporations are trying to negotiate a level playing field, with the stipulation that our rules are watered down to comply with those in the USA. So what would that mean for us?

One of my personal dislikes is GM crops and hence, GM food. We don't need them, and the environmental damage from cross-pollination of crops could be considerable. The promised ability to produce greater crop yields to feed the world has never happened anywhere with any genetically modified foodstuff. GM crops are banned within the EU, but widespread within the USA. Any American product to be sold in Europe has to be GM free, but 70% of American food contains GM crops, and these are not labelled as such. If TTIP is passed, we will not be able to stop GM food being imported, or being grown anywhere in Europe. The reason is that, if we ban it again, the big GM companies will be given the right to sue all the national governments for loss of profits, both now and in the future. Any government that passes a law which could affect this profit could be taken to court by any number of companies, potentially facing lawsuits amounting to billions of pounds.

The proposed legislation for this, as part of the package of TTIP, is called ISDS (Investor-State Dispute Settlement). This allows trans-national corporations to act as if they are the same as national states, so that they can sue governments (and by extension, all of us). The decisions on these disputes are not made in court, but by a panel of three commercial lawyers. One of these acts for the trans-national corporation, one for the government and one “independent”. There is no appeal process, and the outcome can be devastating for the nation state and democracy, especially the latter.

In a similar agreement between the USA and Australia, the cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris is suing Australia for 2.3 billion dollars due to possible lost sales since plain packaged cigarettes were introduced. New Zealand has dropped similar plans for plain packaging as they were also warned of the same action being taken against them if they went ahead. An American tobacco firm has thus been able to change the course of a democratically elected government taking an action that was in their manifesto. Philip Morris also successfully sued the Uruguay government for putting health warnings on cigarette packages, and won hundreds of millions of dollars. Watch out, UK!

In the EU, we have systems in place for trading with 86 nations with similar ISDS rules. The French firm, Veolia, successfully sued Egypt for increasing the Minimum Wage for its people! Even inside the EU, a Swedish energy firm is suing the German government for three billion Euros over the plans to close nuclear power stations. All these “fines” are funded from taxpayers’ money. In Slovakia the new Government had a landslide victory based on their manifesto commitment to end the health care system that was run by foreign health insurance firms, and to return to a state run system. A large Dutch insurance company “won” hundreds of millions in damages.

Here is a list of other worrying aspects related to TTIP:

- Chemical industry safety
- Trade unions
- Minimum wage
- Loss of employment (as industry moves to cheaper wage areas)
- Food Safety
- Privatisation of public services, e.g. NHS, transport, waste water

Proposed actions

To find out more about TTIP, go to www.wdm.org.uk, and sign the “No to TTIP” petition. The World Development Movement is co-ordinating the campaign against TTIP for Europe. I have signed, and so have around one and a half a million other people.

Write to Julian Smith MP at julian.smith.mp@parliament.uk. I did so two weeks ago, but he has been too busy to reply yet!

Look at the “War on Want” website for the excellent report on TTIP by Executive Director John Hilary.

Michael Elstub Settle Local Meeting

A modified version of this article appeared in Settle and Giggleswick Community News

Quaker Values in Education Conference at Woodbrooke 29-31 August 2014

Reasons for Conference

This conference had been arranged in response to growing concerns by Local and Area Meetings about trends in contemporary education in the United Kingdom. Meeting for Sufferings heard these concerns and decided that convening this conference at Woodbrooke was a first step in assessing how to respond at a national level.

Briefing papers presented to Meeting for Sufferings in December 2013 were made available to conference participants and a planning group was assembled: Helen Rowlands, Head of Education at Woodbrooke; Helen Drewery, General Secretary of Quaker Peace and Social Witness at Friends

House, plus four educationalists provided an initial briefing paper that managed the deliberations of participants in what seemed to me to be an open and even handed way.

The focus in alerting Friends to the present situation was a paper prepared by West Cumbria Area Meeting that included in its title: "...that current policies and practice in maintained education in England conflict with our Testimonies." This paper considered how current practices are felt to conflict with Quaker Testimonies. For example:

Truth and Integrity

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled" (Plutarch). We believe that the purpose of education is to enable students to seek the truth and to discern it. Over reliance on rote learning of facts, feeding an examination system, which prizes factual knowledge above understanding, does not encourage independent thinking or challenges to accepted beliefs. To nurture respect for Truth students must appreciate how subject methods of enquiry establish insights and wisdom.

What respect is there for the integrity of the child? Children develop at different rates, have different aptitudes and different levels at home. This is no longer recognised in current developments in English Maintained education, which seemingly views children as units of production, homogenised and pre-judged.

League tables demonstrate less than the whole truth. Targets and league tables make no allowance for those schools that welcome and make provision for children with special needs, or children from disadvantaged communities. A truthful account of educational value cannot be discerned by these means. Unjust competition between schools means that difficult or low achieving pupils are at increasing risk of exclusion.

Justice and Equality

Tests damage true education. Limited aspects of students' abilities are tested. The use of such tests limits the curriculum, exerting counter-productive pressures on teachers and pupils.

There are narrowing definitions of success. The current emphasis on academic achievements results in a loss of respect for practical, artistic and interpersonal skills which are crucial foundations for later learning. This is likely to lead to many pupils feeling that, from an early age, they have failed. This undermines mutual support within the population, which depends on an appreciation of the many and varied skills required to sustain a community.

Simplicity/Sustainability

There appears to be a waste of resources; much money is being spent on transforming the maintained schools system into one that unfairly rewards a minority and does not encourage true equality of opportunity. As in the days of 11+ and selective secondary education, talent will be discouraged and future generations may not reach their full potential. Current spending priorities are not sustainable, as money is diverted from core funding to provision of Free Schools in areas with no shortage of school places.

Peace

There has been a militarisation of schools. Current initiatives such as the troops for teachers programme and the expansion of military cadet training in secondary schools raises concern.

Other Comments

Quaker Schools were mentioned in the briefing papers and at the start of the conference, but it was felt that Friends' ambivalence about the Society's relationship with the Quaker Schools has at times complicated discussion about education in general.

We heard from Isabel Cartwright, the Peace Education Programme Manager at Friends House. She spoke with passion about the Peace Education Programme re-launched in 2012. It has four strands to its work:

- To inspire and support Quakers and others, to promote peace education
- To create and promote peace education resources
- To nurture the peace education movement
- To challenge the militarisation of children and young people.

It was interesting to read about peace initiatives, covered in the first issue of *Educate and disarm* produced in January 2014 by Quaker Peace and Social Witness. These include:

A Peace week arranged in conjunction with a Primary School in the London Borough of Camden

A Peace Education Cluster under the auspices of the Quaker Life Network.

A Teach Peace Pack where an initial print run of 1000 sold out. This can be downloaded free at: www.quaker.org.uk/education.

Format of the Conference

There were a number of sessions both in plenary and groups that sought to discern what we as Quakers felt were the essentials for our maintained schools, what was particularly wrong with the current system and what would improve the situation. A lot of time was spent on a draft, setting out our views and refining the draft accordingly. At the end of the conference the planning group took away our latest thoughts for consideration and subsequently sent participants what I am calling the conference declaration.

Conference Declaration:

Every person is precious – a foundation for Quaker action on education

Quakers believe that the spirit of God is at work in every human being and this belief holds true for our work in education. Our faith commitment to truth, peace, simplicity and equality guides our thinking and our action.

This is why we are committed to working towards schools where people matter, where they thrive through relationships and where the beauty of the whole person can be affirmed. We believe people flourish best in an all-embracing culture of encouragement, nurture and compassion for

teachers, children and young people. The purpose of education is the pursuit of learning, knowledge and questioning in the service of realising our full human potential in an ever-changing world. Its fruits include: discernment, creativity, cooperation, spirituality, moral autonomy and peace. The outcome of this approach will be a fair, diverse, just and good society.

We recognise obstacles (bullet points) to achieving this aspiration within the current English education system, but we also have a vision (arrows) for their transformation.

- Current assessment and inspection arrangements are both inadequate and excessive. They have a pernicious impact on teachers and their students.
 - *Assessment and inspection regimes should be humane and nurturing and recognise a breadth of disciplinary and other experience necessary for the realisation of full human potential.*
- The lack of recognition of the importance of professional knowledge of teachers and research on how children learn, leads to the imposition of untried policies and practices.
 - *The professional knowledge of teachers and research on how children learn should have a significant role in driving educational change, and should be sustained by returning to substantial specialist teacher training provision.*
- The politicisation and marketisation of schooling leads to children and young people being treated as economic units. Schooling is measured by highly-selective performance data, which in turn drive excessively rapid change.
 - *Education should not be a traded commodity but a human endeavour in which people come first. Learners are beneficiaries of education, not consumers.*
- The general inequality in our society has an impact on school provision and admissions practices.
 - *Equality of school provision is best managed through local oversight and fair admissions policies, and the educational disadvantages of poverty need compensation in schools.*
- Schools are becoming increasingly militarised through cadet corps, links with arms manufacturers, and inflexible behaviour policies.
 - *Schools should be places where children and young people learn cooperation, mutuality, discernment, spirituality, moral autonomy and peace.*

We commit ourselves, and encourage other Friends, to work to transform these obstacles in accordance with our testimonies.

The above declaration was agreed at a threshing conference, 'Quaker Values in Education', held at Woodbrooke, 29 - 31 August 2014

John Cope

Keighley Local Meeting

September 2014

Wild, wet and windy

Settle Friends have for the last few years met, whatever the weather, for a walk on New Year's Day. John Geale has been our guide for most of the years in which a surprising number of intrepid folk have braved the climate to walk from Settle and Giggleswick to the café in Feizor.

This year we not only celebrated a new year but the 80th birthdays of two members of the meeting. January the 1st 2015 saw us once again gather at the Meeting House before heading to Giggleswick where more people joined as we proceeded up The Mains.

The rain was only light drizzle at first, but on the return trip became a deluge, challenging the best of the waterproofs and creating lakes of mud on the downward slopes. A brisk south-westerly wind made its presence felt when we reached the top of Giggleswick Scar and was to be a constant companion for the rest of the day. Fortunately the wind was blowing behind us at this stage, so assisted the progress of the less lively among us. Our group was now spread out as we progressed towards Buck Haw Brow but the path was clear even if the long distance views weren't.

At last Feizor came into view and we gratefully entered the steamy warmth of Elaine's tearooms where we were joined by others, who had wisely chosen other means of getting there, to make 25 of us in all for an excellent lunch and birthday cake.

The wind had increased and the drizzle had become rain when we emerged from the comfort of the café but undaunted we set off once more first to Feizor Nick then across increasingly muddy, slippery fields to Hargreaves barn where we joined the road to Knight Stainforth. Our plan had been to go via Stainforth Foss and back alongside the river but so thoroughly soaked were we that we decided to continue along the road back to the start.

Although the weather had done what it could to put a damper on our day out the delightful company, excellent food and the challenge of the walk in such conditions made it a thoroughly satisfying start to the year.

A couple of animal-generated events enlivened our journey.

On entering the field below Giggleswick quarry we encountered a herd of cows accompanied by a good old-fashioned bull with a ring through its nose. The bull did not seem particularly cheerful (unsurprising considering the weather and the interruption of his activities by a bunch of walkers) and he pawed the ground in a show of his displeasure. We gave the cows a wide berth as we toiled up the hill, youngsters ascending like mountain goats while the more mature sensibly went at a steadier pace.

The wind and drizzle had caused sheep and cattle to cluster in the lee of whatever shelter they could find. At one point we were compelled to thread our way through a herd of cows and calves to access a gate to the next field. Here we met the extraordinary sight of a sheep with its head covered by a bag! This poor creature had apparently been trying to gain the

last crumbs of sugar beet molasses from the bag and then had been unable to remove it. Oblivious to our approach, the sheep stood absolutely still until we took the bag off whereupon it cantered off to join the rest of the flock.



Robin Hargreave Settle Local Meeting