



the VAN

Winter 2008/9

Quaker Voluntary Action News www.qva.org.uk
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Working Retreats 2009: Wider International Encounter

We have an exciting and varied programme of events for 2009 – ranging from developing an unusual Quaker burial ground near Manchester to olive picking in Palestine. We shall be continuing our twice yearly visits to the historical home of Quakerism at Swarthmoor Hall whilst exploring a new joint project with Quaker links at a Yoga Centre in Holland. To complete our ventures into Europe this year, there will be an opportunity to walk the Svartbäcken labyrinth when we help out at the Swedish Quaker Retreat Cen-



Swarthmoor: Autumn 2008

RETREAT SESSIONS

Each day includes two led sessions for reflecting individually, in pairs or as a group. From a place of silent worship, we will draw on inspirational texts, the natural environment and our own experiences to nurture our spiritual journeys. Our theme for 2009 is peace. Through meditative, creative and simple shared explorations, we will focus on personal and global issues in the light of our Quaker testimony.

DAILY PROGRAMME

- Morning Meeting for Worship
- 3 hours Work
- 2 led Reflection sessions
- Free time and Social time
- Evening Epilogue

APPLICATION DETAILS

To receive full programme details and an application form either by email or post please contact:

Jasmine Piercy
QVA Working Retreats Co-ordinator
11 Rookery Terrace, Wellington
Somerset TA21 8AY
Tel: 00 44 (0)7910 434941 Email:
jasmine@qva.org.uk

2009 PROGRAMME

February 27- March 1
Taunton, Somerset
Interior decorating of Meeting House.
£40/€50

March 22 – 27
Swarthmoor, Cumbria
Historical Quaker setting in English Lake District.
Varied work tasks in extensive grounds. £95/€115

April 27 – May 4
Laren, Holland
A Quaker-Yoga Encounter.
Garden work and light carpentry.
£90/€110

June 12 – 15
Sale, Cheshire
Unique Quaker burial ground.
Developing and improving the site.
£50/€60

July 11 – 18
Svartbäcken, Sweden
Quaker Retreat Centre in area of natural beauty.
Varied outdoor work tasks.
£90/€110

October 4 – 9
Swarthmoor, Cumbria
17th Century founding place of Quakerism. Tree work and other gardening tasks.
£95/€115

October 23 – 31
Ramallah, Palestine
A Quaker - Palestinian -Israeli Encounter.
Supporting the olive picking harvest.
£100/€120

The cost for volunteers is around £10/€12 per day towards food. Volunteers pay for travel to and from the retreat. There is a small £20/€25 registration fee per event. Bursary help is available – please enquire.

"We became a family for a week and it unfolded in many different ways" Participant Congenies Retreat: April 2008

WORKING RETREATS: LESSONS TO NOTE

QVA – as these pages show – is offering a really exciting Working Retreats programme for 2009.

In 2008 QVA held five working retreats in four different venues. Nearly all participants reported that the retreat experience had been a rich & moving experience for them – yet one with blessings difficult to articulate.

Scrutiny of the 'evaluation forms' shows that participants appreciated the good food & the balance of the programme between work, spiritual reflection & free time. There was also the reward of getting useful work done, sometimes beyond expectation; being creative in some artistic endeavour & getting close to nature.

What came through most powerfully, in reports from volunteers was the value they placed on being part of a joyous spiritual community – where safe & constructive sharing was possible. This gave rise to new insights and, for some, real progress in addressing personal issues. This appreciation of the value of shared community emerged strongly in responses from all five retreats.

What are we to make of this? Working Retreats have so much to offer people. Sharing in a community & giving to others can be important for people & their well-being. Yet, for many of us, positive experience of community living is lacking. At BYM one Friend commented: "Working Retreats! That's what we need in London. People don't even know the name of their neighbours." Local Quaker Meetings can, & often do, provide a sense of community.

Lessons worthy of note? Perhaps (1) that it is worth seriously considering participation in a working retreat & (2) that a major task for our time is developing community living that adds to well-being.

Congenies



For eight sunny days in April, British, Italian, American, Irish & French Friends worked & played hard in a joyous celebration of communal living! Late afternoons were given over to more relaxing reflection sessions on our Quaker testimony to simplicity. Highlights of the event included the five day bonfire, digging up massive roots which when upturned became sculpture creatures, delicious meals taken under

'Preparation, undercoat, gloss, sanding down, poly-filla...these are deeply spiritual words' – ministry during Meeting for Worship at Wellington, Somerset. Sitting there, reflecting on my experience as a participant in a Quaker Voluntary Action Working Retreat, I felt that this ministry summed up the contrasts & surprises of the weekend rather well.

We had arrived on a Friday evening, & were welcomed to Wellington's historic Meeting House by Jasmine Piercy, our facilitator for the weekend. A group of 6, our number included two QVA staff, two members of Wellington Meeting & two from further afield. We were a diverse bunch in many ways, but it was remarkable how quickly the differences (in age, personality & experience of Quakerism) faded as we began to know one

REFLECTIONS ON WOR

the olive trees, singing international folk-songs round the piano & companionship walking & sharing things of the spirit in pairs. The newly reopened Quaker Centre at Congenies,

a space for courses, holidays & retreats, got a real boost from our presence with the laying of a new patio & the clearing of the overgrown burial ground.

Swarthmoor (Spring)



A small, all female group made up the team that tackled the building of a rockery at the entrance to Swarthmoor Hall. The intimacy of the group made for some deep sharing & relaxed companionship. Poetry emerged as an expression for one's own personal spiritual journey. We engaged with the Book of Ruth which one of the participants was studying for a thesis, & for our afternoon off

explored the beauty of the Lake District which continues to inspire so many poets & writers. The wildflower meadow at Swarthmoor was pulled of encroach-

QVA WORKING RETREAT, WELLINGTON

another 'in that which is eternal'.

Saturday unfolded into a pleasing rhythm of practical work, retreat sessions & leisurely mealtimes (we ate in the beautiful Meeting House garden, enjoying the warm sunshine). All present

were prepared to share their thoughts & experiences freely, so a deep sense of friendship & trust was quickly achieved.

In the evening, a 'social' gave us a chance to offer favourite readings, songs or poems to the group. Contributions ranged from Wordsworth to a children's picture book & a Somerset folk song; we had created quite a cosy atmosphere in the Meeting House, & local Friends commented on



how pleasant it was to be sitting there in the evening, making the House feel like a home.

On Sunday, we picked up our paintbrushes at 9am, and then joined Wellington Friends for Meeting for Worship at 10.30am, complete with paint-spattered hands and faces to testify to our efforts. Another communal meal in the garden followed, then one more work session before we shared final reflections and

KING RETREATS IN 2008

ing cow parsley while pots, beds & borders were weeded & re-sown for the summer.

Wrexham



Our return visit to the site of the relatively new Meeting House on the Welsh Borders helped establish the work of local Friends in the creation of a garden. The ongoing task of the weekend was to clear, plant & protect a 30 foot hedge. Copious cups of tea &

cake were provided along with some fine violin playing to relax to.

Wellington

Colour & our responses to it became a thread that wove through the Somerset event in September. We were using colour to paint & decorate the Meeting House interior & began each retreat session by reflecting on a colour wheel. Staying in the homes of local

Friends was particularly enriching & welcoming. The Meeting gained new energy & hope & was delighted to have their building used in a communal effort.

Swarthmoor (Autumn)

There was a real sense of connection with the seasons on this project.

Our practical tasks centred on tree - felling & the creation of habitat piles & wind shields from branches. The cyclical aspect of nature was borne out on the last day as we planted young saplings.

Indoors, for our reflection sessions, the focus continued with creative writing about literal & inner seeds, & a meditation that brought us into a closer awareness with the seasons of the soul.



QVA IN EUROPE

Friends and Meetings across Europe have demonstrated a real enthusiasm for QVA Working Retreats. They can appreciate the numerous potential benefits and value the opportunities that such an event can bring to their often isolated or dispersed communities. Jasmine attended the Quaker Peace and Service Consultation in Brussels which brings together representatives from organisations across Europe. During the event several worthwhile connections were forged leading to QVA Working Retreats being planned for 2009 and beyond. This international aspect of our work on the one hand echoes back to QVA's evolution from a workcamp movement whilst responding to tomorrow's call for putting our faith into action in the global arena.

went our various ways.

What a precious thing it was, enjoying fellowship and a real sense of purpose with people who were passionate about making the world a better place. We wrote haiku poems to sum up what we were taking away from the retreat, and several of the themes which had emerged

over the weekend seemed to crystallise. The late summer sun, windfall apples in the Peace Garden, our 'labour of love' in the Meeting House – all helped to inspire the poems. But above all, the strongest theme seemed to have been the challenge of living fully in the present moment. A QVA Working Retreat is a brief opportunity to do just that, and I warmly recommend the experience to Friends..

Sue Proudlove,
Cardiff Meeting

QVA MOVING FORWARD IN 2008 AND 2009

QVA, like others in the Quaker Community in Britain, has been developing its response to 'A Framework for Action 2009 – 2014' approved by Britain Yearly Meeting in September. Among other things & as a foundation for service, this calls for 'strengthening the spiritual roots in our meetings & in ourselves.' We have made several moves in 2008 relating to this framework.

Firstly, we are pushing ahead with development of our Working Retreats programme, which we feel, relates directly to the corporate priority of strengthening our spiritual roots. Our aim is for the working retreats model to be a tried, tested, well known & widely supported mechanism for spiritual development & service for use by the Quaker community & others.

We are seeking to achieve this by November 2010 – not far away & a demanding task. So far, in 2008, we have focussed on providing a strong retreats programme – & this will continue in 2009. We are drawing lessons from operation of the programme, as we go along, & trying out new approaches including extension of the programme into Europe & recruitment of facilitators to run retreats. Late in 2009 we expect to commission – subject to funding – an independent evaluation of the

programme to inform future implementation.

Secondly we are responding to the call in the framework document for more collaborative working among Friends by developing links with other Quaker bodies. Meetings have been held to this end with Quaker Life, the Quaker Retreat Group & with Young Friends General Meeting.

Part of the QVA mission is to develop 'new ways of volunteering that meet the challenges of our time.' Development of the Working Retreats approach is part of this – but elsewhere progress has been limited in 2008.

A new 'head-hunting' initiative to search out people with special skills & experience for important Quaker work for short periods has made little headway as our first pilot project, in Zimbabwe, was unable to proceed because of difficulties beyond our control.

The Quakers is Forensic Psychiatry initiative which seeks to extend Quaker ministry in secure forensic units & hospitals has not extended beyond Rampton High Security Hospital – where, however, a Quaker Meeting is now well established.

We hope, however, to press ahead in 2009.

"A sense of movement and deepening each day." Participant Swarthmoor: Autumn 2008

NEW TRUSTEES WANTED

QVA is looking for new trustees to serve on the QVA Management Committee, which meets about three to four times a year by telephone conference and once a year as a face-to-face meeting.

We are particularly interested in innovation in Quaker Service and development of the Working Retreats programme. If you are interested please get in touch with the clerk to QVA: Tel: 0044 (0) 1484 687139 or Email: mail@qva.org.uk

INVITATION TO MEETINGS...

Does your Meeting have a project that could benefit from volunteer effort?

Examples of tasks include -

- gardening and tree-work,
- improving burial grounds,
- paving a patio,
- planting hedgerows,
- light carpentry and
- painting and decorating.

We can also offer assistance in the implementation of recycling or composting systems & other 'greening' of our Meeting Houses projects.

If you would like to discuss possibilities do get in touch.

INVITATION TO VOLUNTEERS...

Come to one of our Working Retreats! Participants come from all over Europe and beyond and include Friends, attenders and others interested in exploring the Quaker way.

All ages from 18 to 80+ are welcome & tasks are organised to suit a range of abilities, skills & experience.

Accommodation is usually on-site. Living, cooking and eating together, along with the work and reflection sessions, makes for a very rich & rewarding experience. See front page

INVITATION TO THE AGM...

All are welcome at the QVA Annual General Meeting in the Spring. Date to be arranged. See website for details. www.qva.org.uk

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE QUAKER RETREAT GROUP

QVA is developing a partnership with the Quaker Retreat Group, which offers local, national and international retreats, Quiet Days and similar events. For further details, visit

www.quakerretreatgroup.org.uk

or contact Carol Wise (Correspondent) on 0044 (0) 1943-863213; carol.wise1@btinternet.com or Judith Smith (Newsletter Editor) on 0044 (0) 1484-687139; jsmithholmfirth@tiscali.co.uk

THE PHONE CO-OP – CUT YOUR BILLS AND BENEFIT QVA

We have teamed up with the Phone Co-op to offer telephone & internet services to our supporters.

QVA receive 6% of what you spend each month with the Phone Co-op on telephone calls, broadband, web calls & dial-up Internet access.

The Phone Co-op is an ethical business owned by its customers & run solely for their benefit.

For more information and an application form contact the QVA office. Please register today!

AIDAN LEAVES

Aidan McCartney's period of service as QVA Trustee finished since VAN last went to press. He served as Trustee for about two years – as nominee of EMES (European and Middle Eastern Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation).

We thank him for his contribution to QVA.

To: QVA, 1 Holt Lane, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, HD9 3BW, UK

Name

Address.....

..... Postcode.....

Tel No

E-mail

INFORMATION REQUEST (A5 size SAE please)

Please tell me:

- o about QVA's work and future plans
- o about being a QVA rep to my local meeting
- o about volunteering through QVA
- o about

GIFT AID DECLARATION - (please sign if you pay tax)

Please treat all donations I make to QVA from the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations

(signed).....

(date)/...../.....

Please sign if you pay tax and remember to notify us if you no longer pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations.

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A/c No..... Sort Code - -

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Amount: (circle) £5 £10 £15 £25

£.....

First Payment/...../..... (Immediately if blank)

And then (please circle) monthly / quarterly / yearly.

Instruction to the bank

Please pay the above to

Triodos Bank 16-58-10 for the credit of **Quaker Voluntary Action a/c 03269501.**

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