

Report of Meeting of Friends in Wales Saturday 25th June 2011 at The Pales

Meeting for Friends in Wales is an excellent way to meet new Friends from all over Wales as well as reconnect with Friends from our old AM. Considering the distances some had to travel, the meeting was well attended and 39 Friends filled the Pales.

We heard the Meeting for Sufferings reports for April and June, a Quaker Life report, a report from the CYP Advocates in Wales (before this meeting) and a minute from North Wales AM (also before this meeting). MFW is going to advertise International Conscientious Objectors Day on May 15th and continue to provide copies of the Welsh AM contact lists to those who need them. The Cytun (Churches together in Wales) report bemoaned the fact that there is a predominance of men; Deborah Rowlands will replace Catherine James as MFW representative on Cytun in December. More volunteers are needed for the Eisteddfod at Wrexham from Saturday 30th July to Saturday 6th August (please contact Maria Haines on 01978 860349 or mariahaines@phonecoop.coop).

MFW has initiated Woodbrooke-on-the-Road workshops all over Wales for three years: "Living the Quaker Way". The next one is at Abergavenny on 16th July. Please contact Gill Branch if you are interested. The "Celebrating the Quaker Way in Wales" initiative is discussing funding with the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to enable a book and DVD in Welsh about Spiritual Journeys to be produced.

The main discussion of the morning session was about the effects of cuts to benefits and public services in Wales. Wales is already £300m underfunded and there will be 12% real cuts over 4 years, which cannot be compensated by the private sector. Up to 35,000 public sector jobs could go. The Benefits Disability appeals system is creating stress and fear. Women are especially affected in the public sector, education and 2/3 of benefits go to women. Single parents (majority of whom are women) will see a reduction of 11% of their income, which in reality will be more like 18%. Much rural poverty is much more difficult to assess than urban poverty. What can we do? We heard of a new community centre in Abergavenny and a new drop in centre for teenagers in Presteigne. Are we living in a false bubble? We should be cutting our consumption so that the world's finite resources can be shared more. It was decided to send the minute to Meeting for Sufferings and copy it to Rowan Williams and Cytun.

The speaker for the day was Alistair Fuller, who is the Quaker Life Outreach Officer and who challenged us with "Gently and Generously; how we can share our Quaker Story". This was an excellent session and Alistair is a very inspiring speaker. He believes that Outreach is about making it possible for people to discover Quakerism. We can do this by telling our stories and living out our faith. What people are searching for is a different way of life not new ideas or creeds. We must be ready to engage the Quaker Testimonies in our everyday life; the silence and love we experience in meeting enables us to achieve this. We should share our experiences and stories. It is very hard for someone to walk into a Quaker meeting for the first time and our meeting houses have to have a climate that is open and welcoming. There are three important questions to ask ourselves;

"What drew me?"

"What held me?"

"What still holds me?"

Hopefully in the answering of these questions we can hold the door open long enough for someone to come in, even if just for a while. We must always describe Quakerism positively, exploring horizons not boundaries and being open, helpful, encouraging and prompted by love.

Kate Binney
27 June 2011