

Chester World Development Forum

Minutes of the final Forum Meeting held on Tuesday 14 November 2023 at 7.00pm at The Unity Centre



Present: Terry Green, Bernard Payne, Gill Miller, John Tacon, Lindsay Lloyd-Cussons, Ann McCarthy, Heather Swainston, Bernie Draper, Dai and Margaret Owen, Angela MacQuiban, Pam Price, Mike Wyatt, Linda and Stewart Shuttleworth, Chris Russell, Vicki and Peter Jenner, Jean Cornes, Terry Walsh, Rose Johnson, Eric and Joan Bowers, Tony Walsh, Peter Speirs, Philip Austin and Sheila Little, the Lord Mayor of Chester.

Apologies: Sue Bownas, Pam Byrne, Daphne Peers, Diane Williams, Catherine Green, Michael Melville and Arnold Wilkes

Presentation by Peter Speirs and Philip Austin: “Quaker Peace Initiatives”

Peter is a member of Chester Quakers and both he and Philip are members of the Northern Friends Peace Board.

Peter explained that for Quakers

- Peace is not an option but an imperative.
- They disagree with so much being spent on armaments.
- They consider that wars are not started by ordinary people but the ordinary people are the ones who suffer.

Quaker work for peace has gone on for over 350 years. In 1660, Quakers made a declaration to the world at large. This declaration was made to Charles II distancing Quakers from the Fifth Monarchists and stated that Quakers “utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons”. This declaration has become the foundation of Quakers work for peace.

Philip is the coordinator of Northern Peace Board which was set up in 1913 and is based in Bolton.

He explained that Quaker’s work for peace is:

- Faith based
- Not easy- very challenging
- Mixture of small scale and collective actions
- At the forefront of initiatives in working for peace. For instance, Quakers living in a Kibbutz on the Gaza border who’ve been working hard in building peace with the Palestinians

In 2000 the UN declared a decade of “Culture for Peace” and Philip considered that, following this, the world has a greater insight into what peace would look like.

The Quaker’s strands of work include:

- Concern for peace taxes – a contentious issue - our taxes being used for armaments and conflicts
- How to engage with those in power – those who can make a difference. A lot of discussion is centred around this issue.
- Campaigning at different levels for disarmament, against investment in armaments and concern about the relationship between conflict and the climate crisis.
- Looking at security levels, an alternative security review and questioning are wars or military responses the best way forward?
- Conflict resolution or transformation where Quakers act as intermediaries asking the question “how to engage in resolving conflicts in a different way?” Quakers actually fund these initiatives

- Peace initiatives in Northern Ireland - building bridges between communities. Quakers have a cottage on the outskirts of Belfast where children from the different communities come to play together.
They also have a house in the grounds of Belfast University which provides the space and opportunity for people to come together and discuss their differences. Quakers have created models for how that could work.
- Peace education and awareness raising part in schools - learning about rights and responsibilities. This also includes an “Alternative to Violence” project.
- Quakers have responded to the Ukraine conflict with small groups raising funds to help families. Quakers built links between the East and West during the cold war and they have tried to do the same in the Ukraine conflict but it is much harder. There are a small number of conscientious objectors in Ukraine - “Right not to Fight”. Letters have been written to the Government asking how peace can be built after the conflict. What right have we to say to Ukrainians that they should not fight but Quakers believe in engaging with our Government to look at ways forward.
- As regards the conflict in Gaza, Quakers have been calling for a ceasefire and for humanitarian aid to be allowed in.

Terry Green thanked Peter and Philip for their interesting presentation and reiterated the importance of these peace initiatives in the present climate.

There followed a PowerPoint presentation outlining the history of CWDF and detailing some of the many campaigns that have taken place over the 30 years. Many thanks to Bernard for putting this presentation together. (It is now on the CWDF website and viewable at <https://www.chesterwdf.org.uk/news>)

Sheila Little, the Lord Mayor of Chester, then gave a speech thanking CWDF for its commitment to world development, for raising awareness of the issues and for promoting local action. As the theme for her year as Mayor was “Volunteering”, she particularly wanted to thank those in CWDF who have committed so much time and energy over the years.

Chris Russell (former MP and member of CWDF) gave a short speech in which she also praised the work of the group and encouraged all of us to continue campaigning for the return in overseas aid to 0.7% of GNI.



Sheila and Chris then cut the special celebratory cake followed by time for socializing and sharing of memories.

Heather Swainston offered to put together a “Book of Memories” and invited people to write their memories on post-it notes.

Terry Green thanked everyone for coming to this special evening and for supporting CWDF. **But** we hope this is not the end of our commitment to world development issues and will let you all know in due course about the next stage.