

# QLGF

## Newsletter of the Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship

No. 129, January 2011

### **Angus Wemyss Earnshaw** **1924 - 2010**

With the death of Angus Earnshaw on 15 December at the age of eighty-six the Fellowship has lost one of its founding fathers, one of its most colourful characters and a Friend and free spirit of enormous kindness and integrity who battled tirelessly for the causes he believed in and touched many people's lives.

Despite the Scottish name and although he lived most of his life in London, Angus was proud of being a Geordie. The Newcastle family shipbuilding firm took Angus's ancestors all over the world, and his great-grandmother was Filipina, perhaps accounting for Angus's exotic good looks.

The years of the Second World War saw Angus as a student at Durham University. Here, along with other conscientious objectors, and with the



support of Quakers, he volunteered to be one of a group of 'human guinea pigs' on whom treatments were tested for scabies and other medical conditions common among service personnel.

After the war Angus moved to Blackheath in London for a job as an industrial mathematician with the National Coal Board. Later he moved into local government,

where he was active in trade union work. When he retired he was working for the Haringey Borough Council, heading the Occupational Health and Welfare Department in the course of which he dealt with many equality issues and rights education.

The experience he gained of public speaking, document drafting, committee work and negotiating was to be put to good use in many other areas of his life.

Like many gay men of his generation, Angus married as a young man, and had two sons, Edwin and Garry. Relations were not always easy in later life with the sons, one of whom predeceased him.

After he and his wife separated, Angus moved to north London.

**Continued on Page 6**

## In this issue:

Angus Earnshaw RIP	1 and 6-7
Dates for your Diary	2
Poem: Hostage Situation	2
Editorial	3
Clare Dimyon honoured	3-4
Dial a Recording Clerk	4
Round-up ...	5
Loving remembered ...	7
Halloween ...	8
Homophobia repentance ...	8-9
Quaker, Gay and Celibate ...	9-10
Spamalot & the pursuit of fun	11
Poem: Stage	11
Review: "Becoming Drusilla"	12
What is a Safe Space?	12
Interfaith Relations ...	13-14
Poem	14-15
No Minotaurs?	16
QLGF Business Minutes	17
Communications Team ...	17-18
Membership Officer ...	19-20
Exodus on way out?	20
LibDems & Marriage ...	21
Stonewall & Marriage ...	21-22
CPs for all ...?	22
US Protestants & Marriage ...	23
Iceland Update ...	23
Your Committee	24
Classified Ads	24
Gay Spirit 2011 ...	24



## Dates for your Diary

**QLGF Spring 2011 Gathering** is planned to be held at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane on 8<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> April 2011. See flier inside this issue for more details.

**QLGF Autumn 2011 Gathering** will be at a venue-to-be-decided in the South East of England; date to be decided

**QLGF Spring 2012 Gathering** will be at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire on April 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> 2012

## Hostage situation

God  
Holed up by the riverbank  
Surrounded by our marksmen  
Threatening  
Cancer, earthquakes, rains of frogs

Send in the negotiators,  
Offer a ram, a firstborn,  
Foreskins, the bloody stones,  
Offer to do his dirty work for him

Sooner or later we have  
To storm the copse.

PW

### Contact Details and other newsletter information

- The newsletter of the Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship is published four times a year.
- A **plain text version** suitable for downloading for use with either a 'Brailnote' machine or 'spoken word' programmes will be made available on the QLGF website: [www.qlgf.org.uk/newsletters.htm](http://www.qlgf.org.uk/newsletters.htm)
- Editorial queries, suggestions, comments, letters and contributions are most welcome: send to Stephen at 78 Upsdell Avenue, London N13 6JL. [stagbeetle63-qlgfnews@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:stagbeetle63-qlgfnews@yahoo.co.uk). All other communications with the Fellowship, including admin problems with the newsletter, changes of address, etc to Ruth, the National Contact, at 46 the Avenue, Starbeck, Harrogate, HG1 4QD. [qlgfcontact@btclick.com](mailto:qlgfcontact@btclick.com).
- Editors usually initial their contributions, the editors are Stephen (SC) and Nick (production and design guru - NJ). Editorials are the opinion of the editors, not the committee or Fellowship. Material is presumably the opinion of the person who wrote it, and cannot be assumed to be anyone else's. If you are reading this and you are not a member, why not join? Individual Quaker Meetings can also join as Supporting Meetings.

### Ordinary membership:

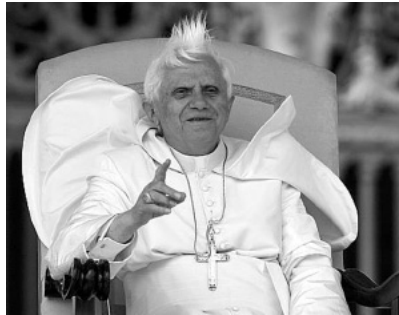
Standard Rate: 12 Months: January - December: Single - £18; Double: £32; Reduced Rate Single - £9; Double: £16 (If you join after September 1<sup>st</sup>, then membership runs until the end of the following year.)

**Supporting meeting membership:** £15 (or £40 for three years).

## Editorial:

Normally any statement by the Pope involving human sexuality can be safely filed either under platitude or reactionary nonsense.

His recent comments about condoms go beyond this. For the first time the Catholic hierarchy has stated that for people not abiding by the letter of social teaching, it might be the ethical and responsible thing to use condoms under certain limited conditions (*to protect someone from HIV/AIDS if outside a long term loving relationship*). Initial reports that he had singled out male prostitutes were a mistranslation. This was clearly a planned statement, Vatican spin if anything broadened the actual statement. Never has become sometimes. The immediate question is why an HIV positive Catholic man should not use the same logic in making love



to his wife; why not protect her, for is she not more important to him than a prostitute? Then, why should a Catholic couple, fearful for the medical consequences of his wife becoming pregnant, not use the same thinking? I do see the case for the Church's intransigence sometimes, because one crack, one slight melting, is a beginning of a weakening.

And some commentators have then said that comments about trying to use sexuality responsibly open the door a crack towards same sex relationships – although this

wasn't obviously his intention.

Glaciers are not there on Tuesday and melted on Wednesday. In 1984, the citizens of Oceania would suddenly wake up to find that not only had the state switched allies in the permanent war, but that they pretended they had 'always been' allied with Eurasia. No-one can seriously expect the Catholic Church to change like that. But any change has to start somewhere.

Many Catholics have long seen the Church's position on all this as nonsense; they would join us in seeing this position as almost as illogical, slightly less inhumane, but the first signs of thaw. The Church had to admit it was wrong to have Bruno burned for saying the Sun was just another star ... let's hope it takes less than four hundred years on this issue.

**The Eds ...**

---

## History as Quaker Lesbian receives first honour for PRIDE

Brighton lesbian Clare Dimyon was presented with an MBE by Prince Charles at an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace on Friday 29 October.

Clare Dimyon, 45, a Quaker, is being honoured for "services to promoting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Central and Eastern Europe".<sup>1</sup> This is a historic first honour for PRIDE. A party of three lesbians of three generations, from Britain, Poland and Hungary accompanied Clare to Buckingham Palace. One of them, Gaby Charing, a 66 year old lawyer exclaimed: "I never thought I'd live to hear the Lord Chamberlain utter the words



"Lesbian" "Gay" "Bisexual" and "Transgender" inside Buckingham Palace. I remember his office censoring homosexual plays in the sixties." It is believed that even the use of the names most LGBT people use to describe themselves, is a historic first. As a gay Lithuanian commented "It doesn't get more official than that!"

Clare's first parade was in London 25 years ago, in 1985. She was first inspired to take part in PRIDE parades in Central and Eastern (C&E) Europe following the events of Riga PRIDE 2006 and the banned Warsaw PRIDE of 2005. Since then she has participated in PRIDE parades throughout the former Soviet bloc. In 2009, she created the PRIDE Solidarity Tour, visiting each one in turn, to draw attention to emerging PRIDEs and LGBT communities in Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Macedonia, the Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. She was most

## Church Government, let's do this the world's way.

### New Recording Clerk – you decide!

Phone 0997 330033 and then add the two digits for your preferred candidate:

recently at Belgrade PRIDE where she witnessed how the Serbian authorities successfully protected PRIDE participants from violent hooliganism.

Clare says: *“Slovak LGBT are kind enough to call me the ‘Mother of Slovak PRIDE’ but I think it might be more accurate to call me the ‘delinquent aunt’ of PRIDE in Central & Eastern Europe. They do all the work and take all the risks, I just show up to waves flags and try to be a supportive presence.”*

Clare has been instrumental in increasing the number of countries whose embassies routinely support the human rights of LGBT people from seven in 2007 to twenty two in 2010.

This year alone saw the first ever PRIDE marches in Vilnius and Bratislava, both with significant support from the diplomatic community, British ambassadors have attended PRIDE parades in Vilnius, Bucharest, Budapest, Bratislava and the historic Warsaw EuroPRIDE parade held on 17 July in Poland.

Clare says: *“The ambassador in Nepal attended the first Kathmandu PRIDE and I hadn't even asked! However I do not think any of this would have happened were it not for the support of Caroline Lucas now MP for (Brighton Pavilion) who recommended my ideas to the FCO (Foreign & Commonwealth Office).”*

**CBD**

01. **Peter Tatchell.** Debonair human rights campaigner – sound on same sex marriage, green issues and human rights. Doesn't believe in God but apparently that's no longer a requirement.

02. **Anne Widdecombe.** Her forthright style, love of animals, and Catholic enthusiasms will suit some Friends particularly those who want closer relations with other churches. Anne has already promised to learn circle dancing.

03. **Roger de Courcy Braithwaite-Fry-Gurney.** Bred from eight distinguished Quaker families, he has served on every national, area and local committee conceivable, often simultaneously. No one can immediately remember any particular contribution but he does a splendid 'thoughtfully considering the last ministry' face and can sleep with his eyes open. Has had 387 letters published in the Friend all of which open with the phrase "Friends I was saddened to read..."



04. **Recordo 2010** is a project by some computer scientist Young Friends to develop an artificial Recording Clerk web based function combining the best artificial intelligence and a database of all Quaker documents ever published in any language. It is currently being beta tested but has not proved entirely reliable. After failing to get a clear answer to the query "Does the Light that lights every man that enters the world also enlighten me?" Recordo 2010 went into a sulk that has lasted six weeks.

05. **Ann O Mouse** is clerk of Gumbo Parva local meeting and convenor of the Friends Fellowship of Prophetic Breakdancing. She has served for ten years on the National Council for Quango Reduction and the British-Narnia Friendship Council.

**DN**

## Roundup ...

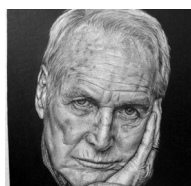
Handbags at dawn in the scientific community. Astronomer Royal and President of the Royal Society **Lord Rees** brushed **Stephen Hawking's** complete non-proof of the non-existence of God aside thus "Stephen Hawking is a remarkable person who I have known for 40 years and for that reason any oracular statement he makes get exaggerated publicity. I know Stephen Hawking well enough to know that he has read very little philosophy and even less theology so I don't think we should attach any weight to his views on this topic."



Charmingly **El Dawkins** once called Rees "a compliant quisling" because Rees is not wound up about religion. This led to an interesting aside by **Hugo Rifkind** in the Times "Is it really rational for atheists to be so nasty... Personally, if I were desperately keen to convince the world that faith wasn't required to be a loving and benevolent agent, I'd be at pains not to act like a nasty bilious oaf..."



**Paul Newman** was quoted "BY the time I get through with all the things I really admire about people, what they do with their private



parts is probably so low on the list that it is irrelevant." This in a Times editorial slapping themselves on the back for getting a Stonewall award for their gay coverage (which is, to be fair, generally quite good). I remember in the Eighties the Times running a leader calling an equal age of consent "irresponsible libertinism". Times change.

Meanwhile their religious affairs correspondent **Ruth Gledhill** continues to get publicly more irritated with traditionalists over gays and women, having been generally sympathetic to the traditionalist case. Aren't we all made in the image of God, she says? I am not sure that **Bishop Gene Robinson** saying that **Rowan Williams** has been 'kidnapped by aliens' on the gay issue was entirely tactful but maybe he has more cause than many to let his good humour slip about the Great Welsh Lettuce.



Happiness is flavour of the month. The **Legatum Institute** published a prosperity index which tried to adopt a broader measure than just GDP. (One economist I have read said "GDP is a crude measure, since a car crash increases it, and taking your kids to play on the beach doesn't alter it").

**Legatum** uses market research about how we feel about stuff as well as objective numbers. We are 13<sup>th</sup> out of a

hundred countries – it helps to be small and Scandinavian but the US beats us, but interestingly, the UK is 98<sup>th</sup> in optimism about jobs, 101<sup>st</sup> in confidence about financial institutions and 93<sup>rd</sup> in expectations of the future economy – ranking us with Yemen and Zimbabwe. **Anthony Hilton** writing in the Standard says "The UK is glum because the papers say so" and expressly blames the Mail for the country's negativity.



**Nigel Evans** has become the 22<sup>nd</sup> MP and the 13<sup>th</sup> Conservative, to come out. With around 3% of the House of Commons now openly gay, this suggests that LGB people are heading towards better representation than the ethnic minorities.



**Barack Obama** has signed into law an Act ensuring CIA torturers and assassins can be openly gay. "IT is a proud day for our democracy" he said "that members of our secret police can kidnap, torture and assassinate enemies of the state, in murky overseas operations, whatever their sexual orientation."



Senate Republicans failed to block the Act, which repealed a law allowing assassins to be secretly gay. "Morale among these God fearing Americans will suffer, if they have to waterboard suspected terrorists, alongside open homosexuals" said Senate Leader Malachi Wingnut. **DN**

**Continued from Page 1**

The house in New Southgate always seemed to be full of DIY materials for improvement jobs that he never quite got round to. It was here in the mid-1980s that, through their shared concerns with social work and human rights issues, Angus met Philip Reilly. The two were to be together for the rest of Angus's life, and eventually became civil partners.

Angus and Philip were to have a long association with Finchley meeting. For both of them Quakerism was a matter of *'faith in action'* rather than contemplation; and although they both did their fair share of committee work they were not always, especially in Angus's later years, regular Sunday worshippers.

Angus's main contribution to Quakerism had come in the early 1970s when, with David Blamires and the late John Shackleton, he had set up what was then the Friends Homosexual Fellowship. This took considerable bravery, perseverance and commitment only a few years after homosexuality had been partly decriminalised and when it was a considerably more contentious issue even among Friends, not to mention other churches and the general public, than it has since become.

For many years Angus did much of the organising of the Fellowship's conferences and activities, as well as providing hospitality to lesbian and gay Friends and attenders visiting London, counselling those unsure about their sexuality and supporting those who were

wanting to come out or facing discrimination at work or in their meetings – the latter category a much smaller one now, thanks largely to Angus and the other pioneers, though it has still not disappeared entirely.

Angus published his poetry and other writings in the Fellowship's Newsletter and was active on the committee. Some members used to joke that committee meetings took twice as long when Angus was present. Angus was well aware of this and played along with it.

The truth was that Angus's careful preparation and attention to detail often meant that proper consideration was given to business items that might have been hurried through or overlooked. The scheme he advocated for sharing travelling costs to conferences, which he liked to call *'fooled pairs'* (Angus was fond of *spoonerisms*), was typical: an excellent and progressive idea that other, lazier people found too much trouble to implement seriously.

During all this time Angus was a keen national and international traveller, often building bridges with other Quaker or lesbian and gay groups. He had friends in many countries, not least Norwegians, whose language he spoke fluently.

Angus's other main contribution to Quaker life was in the several very happy months he and Philip spent as wardens of Swarthmoor Hall, the home of Margaret Fell and George Fox at Ulverston, now owned by the Society. Never afraid to get his hands dirty, Angus kept

the seventeenth-century house in good repair while Philip revived his former thespian talents as they showed visitors round and brought the Hall's history to life. When they left they produced a long and detailed report raising concerns and making suggestions about security, access, drainage and other practical issues related to the Hall and the plans for an extension. Shamefully this report was suppressed, and was never seen by the Swarthmoor Hall committee for whom it was intended.

Later Angus and Philip spent some years in Amsterdam, where they hoped to buy and run one of the many gay hotels and guesthouses. With characteristic thoroughness they learned Dutch, as well as supporting the small local Quaker meeting and entertaining many friends and visitors.

Unfortunately the gay hotel proved elusive, and it was at this time that Angus's health began to give cause for concern. They returned to England, first to Finchley and finally, hardly a stone's throw from their former stamping ground at Lombard Road, a development of new houses in the grounds of the former Colney Hatch mental hospital where the roads were called Baron Court, Balmoral Drive, Regent Way, Countess Close and the like – just right, they used to say, for two old queens like them.

Philip trained and then practised as a psychotherapist as well as developing and managing a counselling service based in Greenwich for the

LGBT community.

When Angus was diagnosed with prostate cancer and heard that there were no support groups, it was characteristic of Angus that he promptly set up not just one but two – one for men with prostate cancer, the other for gay men with cancers of all types. He spent most of his time and energy arranging meetings and counselling and supporting people, using his own home telephone line. For this work he was later honoured by being made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine.

For many years Angus's illness developed only slowly. The unpleasant side-effects and consequences of the treatment, together with increasing deafness, did little to slow up his punishing schedule, to which were now added many visits to hospitals and consultants.

Only in the last couple of years were his activities, alertness and mobility much restricted, with Philip heroically caring for Angus and managing his complicated medication schedule as well as running the house and keeping down two demanding jobs. Finchley Friends, as well as many non-Quakers, gave support, and a memorial meeting was held at Finchley meeting house after Angus's funeral and cremation on 22 December.

Visitors and friends were sometimes dismayed by Angus and Philip's regular bickering, but this was no more than two strong personalities striking sparks off each other, and a more devoted couple

it would be hard to find. Neither would have achieved all he did without the other, and their strengths and weaknesses complemented each other well.

Angus was forthright, challenging and outspoken, and threw himself wholeheartedly into causes he believed in. He could sometimes be difficult, demanding or obstinate. He was also immensely kind, generous and funny.

More conventional Friends were sometimes bemused by Angus's playfulness – the ribald stories and jokes, the 'Hello sexpot' telephone greetings, the signature with the A written to resemble a penis. But for others this was liberating and empowering, and as an out and proud gay man he was an inspiration and role model for many of us. 'Let your lives speak.' Not many Friends have spoken with as much love, earnestness and passion as Angus.

**John Banks**

**Comment:**

We were very sorry to hear of the death of Angus Earnshaw, as the newsletter was going to print, and our thoughts are with Philip and all his family and friends. Angus was a pioneer in the Society of Friends, having been closely involved in the small group which eventually led to the Friends Homosexual Fellowship, the previous incarnation of QLGF. He was a direct link to the time when many in the Society entirely bought the then conventional view on human sexuality. Donations to Marie Curie Cancer Care please.

**The Eds**

## Loving ...



Mildred Loving, with her partner Richard, were plaintiffs in the American Supreme Court, who in 1967 set aside the ban on interracial marriage. (*In the wonderful case Loving vs. Virginia.*) Richard was killed in 1975 but on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the case Mildred said

*"Not a day goes by that I don't think of Richard and our love, our right to marry, and how much it meant to me to have the freedom to marry that person precious to me, even if others thought he was 'the wrong sort of person' for me to marry. I believe all Americans, no matter their race, no matter their sex, no matter their sexual orientation, should have that same freedom to marry."*

*"Life without love is like a tree without blossoms or fruit. Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself. To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night. To wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks for another day of loving."*

**Kahlil Gibran**

*A kiss is a lovely trick designed by nature to stop speech when words become superfluous.*

**Ingrid Bergman**

## Halloween ...

A friend sent me a photo of a child at Halloween. It's a lovely photo of a five year old dressed as Daphne from Scooby Doo, (the glamorous one, if you don't know the cartoon). Clearly 'Daphne' is having a great time with her cheeky grin, perched on an enormous pumpkin. Except this Daphne is a boy, you can guess from the photo actually, and the photo is on his mother's blog. He chose the costume, his Mom was supportive but checked he knew he might be teased, he went to the school Halloween party, and three mothers had a go at his Mom about it.

At five, Daphne knew it could be a big deal dressing as a girl. His mum had to support him. And most people at the party (and 99% of the comments on the blog) were supportive. There were just some people who were small minded, and disapproved.

*"If you think that me allowing my son to be a female character for Halloween is somehow going to 'make' him gay then you are an idiot. Firstly, what a ridiculous concept. Secondly, if my son is gay, OK. I will love him no less. Thirdly, I am not worried that your son will grow up to be an actual ninja so back off.*

*If my daughter had dressed as Batman, no one would have*



*thought twice about it. No one.*

*But it also was heartbreaking to me that my sweet, kind-hearted five year old was right to be worried. He knew that there were people like [the mothers]. And he, at 5, was concerned about how they would perceive him and what would happen to him."*

There are gender oppressions that works both ways. Most children now know by eight that boys are 'less well behaved' and 'do less well at school'. I saw this at nursery where playworkers routinely penalised boys for being boys – for young children, female was the norm. Except that when a playworker with three younger brothers turned up, she had those boys happy and cooperative, (she was also loved by the girls) but she understood the differences.

The right to wear a skirt to a party is not a big right, except that it is, it is about the right to be ourselves, where it does

not hurt other people.

'Boo' has become a media megastar (and that really worries me, because the media is never neutral and privacy is priceless) with millions of hits to the blog and 19000 comments. Something largely held within a largely supportive school is now everywhere. And in some circles lies are circulating about this little boy (such as that his mother chose the costume, she didn't, that she didn't challenge him – she did because she said five year olds change their minds every two seconds, and that she said he was gay- she didn't she said it was a dumb question at five).

Likewise Dyson, the five year old 'Princess Boy' whose parents have ended up doing a book, and being on Oprah and the like. Dyson is a boy, he's perfectly clear about that, most of his friends are boys and he likes sports. He also wears pretty dresses lots of the time. His brother, his friends, his sports mad father and his mum are supportive, as is his school. But now his mum has taken him round the TV channels ... someone has to be first, someone has to start challenging attitudes, but it is a fearsome thing to expose your child to condemnation round the world. Grayson Perry made his choices as an adult. **SC**

## Christian repents of homophobia with plan for three-week pilgrimage

Christian writer and activist Symon Hill has announced that he plans to walk from Birmingham to London as a pilgrimage of repentance for his former homophobic attitudes.

Hill, the associate direc-

tor of the Ekklesia thinktank, will speak at churches along the way, encouraging the Christian Church as a whole to repent of homophobia and to think differently about sexuality.

Taking a circuitous route of around 150-200 miles over

about three weeks, Hill will arrive in London on the day before the Pride march on 2 July 2011. Between now and then he is urging churches to join him in expressing repentance and to offer to host him on the route. The precise route will depend

on hosting offers but is likely to include several places in which Hill has lived, including Coventry, Daventry and Oxford.

*"I have struggled for years with issues of sexuality,"* said Symon Hill, *"Through prayer, reflection, personal experience and reading the Bible. These struggles have led me to the conclusion that it is not homosexuality, but homophobia, that is sinful and contrary to the message of Christ"*.

The walk has been endorsed by Ekklesia, the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, Courage UK and Inclusive Church. *"Many churches continue to reject loving same-sex relationships and to oppose equality. Others have failed to speak out due to a misplaced desire for unity,"* said Hill. *"Given the hurt and abuse involved, minor changes are not enough. As Christians, we are called to take a stand against injustice."*

The human rights cam-



paigner Peter Tatchell welcomed the news of Hill's plan. *"Symon Hill is bearing witness and setting an inspiring example of Christian repentance for 2,000 years of church homophobia,"* said Tatchell, *"I hope Pope Benedict and Archbishops Rowan Williams and John Sentamu will join him."*

Symon Hill is the author of *The No-Nonsense Guide to Religion* and writes for the *Guardian*, *Morning Star* and various Christian publications. He is a signatory to the Common Wealth statement of Christian writers, activists and theologians

committed to economic justice and opposed to the government's cuts.

In 1998, Hill organised a "Church Crawl", walking for a week to raise Christian awareness of depression. He later oversaw media relations for the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) and was part of the team that took the government to court over BAE's Saudi arms deals in 2006-08. As a result, he was nominated as a Hero of 2007 by the activist comedian Mark Thomas in the *Independent on Sunday*. More information about the pilgrimage is available at [www.repenting.wordpress.com](http://www.repenting.wordpress.com) **SH**

*Eds add: Symon is a member of QLGF and is interested to hear of individuals or groups who would like to support this proposal. The plan is to speak at and sleep over at a different faith building each day. Much of the walk he wishes to do alone.*

---

## Celibacy, Quakerism and Being Gay

With the recent visit of the Pope and the upsets of gay Anglican priests, celibacy is a big subject at present. Rowan Williams has recently accepted that Bishops can be gay but not in a physical relationship? Some of us may feel we have the best of all possible worlds, for body, mind, feelings and spirit, in being Quaker. We are able to be 'Whole'.

One of the main reasons I became a Friend was because my sexuality was accepted at last – 1980, when I was 45. I could 'come out' openly to the Meeting of both hetero and gay Quakers. Among Friends, gayness was not seen as sin,

unlike in other churches. In fact, 'sin' does not seem to be in the Quaker vocabulary at all! More than this, the concept of 'that-of-God' within everyone means that gay love is a form of God's love – it is part of my inner divinity. I found this liberating. So, in turn accepted Friends (82) becoming a Member. It was good too to have support on my spiritual journey as a gay – the part of me which had previously had to be kept hidden.

Earlier in my life, the 40s and 50s, the nuns at my convent school had taught us about 'sinful lusts of the flesh'. This seemed to refer to any sex which was



outside marriage and not for the procreation of children. It was wrong apparently to enjoy sex unless 'making a baby' and within a loving married relationship (man and wife.) Nevertheless, we explored, in our 'innocent' adolescent way – physical relationships. I made up for this 'sinfulness' by being extra pious

in chapel! The nuns taught that those who were single on unable to become mothers, should instead find some other way of serving God – e.g. a fulfilling job, a vocation. I did the latter in 1953 by going to train as a nurse. However, I also had a loving gay relationship! Thus I was becoming split between my spiritual life and the real me. Being gay, of course, had to be kept secret. Otherwise my career would have been ruined. Although lesbianism was not against the law (as for gay men in those days) it was still seen as disgusting and debased – so not worthy of a noble profession like nursing. It was assumed one would ‘take advantage’ of one’s patients – the vulnerable in one’s care. It was thought that gays were promiscuous and had no control over their passions.

I also had to keep my sexuality secret in whatever church I attended, mostly RC or Anglican. I had not yet discovered Friends. My prayers to God (in those days a ‘God-out-there’) were about asking forgiveness (and being ashamed) for our physical acts, yet giving thanks for our relationship. It felt so ‘right’ for me and my partner. Being secretive (from the 50s until the 80s) put a strain on my

gay relationships. Having to pretend – not being able to come out to parents or brothers – meant I was never truly myself. I went through four long term relationships (one at a time!) But also, because of this, I was building a very successful career to the top of my profession. We were all becoming graduates (with Nursing Chairs in Universities) so eventually I became a senior lecturer looking after the further education of health professionals. I was also exploring complementary medicine and becoming a therapist in my spare time.

Away from the hospital, NHS atmosphere and in being an academic, meant others were a little more accepting. There was more inclusiveness by now (late 70s) at least among the socialist intellectuals who were my work companions. But still, there was a chasm between my spirituality, my beliefs and values, and me, as a sexual person. This meant however I was becoming aware of how fragmented I was - still not really sure who I was in the many different roles I had to play. My integration was able to begin when I had a NDE (near death experience) and ‘woke-up’ as if for the first time, as a whole person. Doing my psychosynthesis

training completed the healing. BY becoming a Quaker I found my true authentic self. I gradually integrated and accepted all my different parts within my personality. The concept of having a higher self became a belief in God-immanent – the divine -within me. However I was going through the breakup of my last relationship (094). We were neither of us the same person we had fallen in love with. My spirituality and mysticism was deepening. No longer seemed to need ‘an other half’. I realised that the relationship had been propping me up; preventing me becoming a complete person in myself. I was now evolved to being body, mind, feelings and spirit in my holistic self. I am sure others can be complete in this way within their relationship? However, I wanted to explore, for a while, being wholly me alone – celibate n a pure integration of self. This felt appropriate for being a Quaker, spiritual healer. This is now my ‘retirement’ job at 75. I have been celibate happy and fulfilled for 26 years – a gay, celibate Quaker.

**Elizabeth M Angas**

*The NDE led me to Friends and to our interest group QLGF and also to Friends Fellowship of Healing (FFH).*

---

## **And on the subject**

*“It is impossible to believe that the same God who permitted His own son to die a bachelor regards celibacy as an actual sin”*

**Henry Louis Mencken**

*“The vow of celibacy is a matter of keeping one’s word to Christ and the Church. a duty and a proof of*

*the priest’s inner maturity; it is the expression of his personal dignity.”*

**Pope John Paul II**

*“It is fatally easy for Western folk, who have discarded chastity as a value for themselves, to suppose that it can have no value for anyone else. At the same time as Californians try to re-invent*

*“celibacy,” by which they seem to mean perverse restraint, the rest of us call societies which place a high value on chastity “backward.”*

**Germaine Greer**

*“As to marriage or celibacy, let a man take which course he will, he will be sure to repent.”*

**Socrates**

## Spamalot and the Quakerly Pursuit of Fun ...

Having failed to attend performances either in London or New York, I was delighted to make a special pilgrimage to Harrogate earlier this year take part in the great silliness that is a performance of Spamalot. I then discovered that the Grand Tour thereof was coming to Edinburgh in October – and decided that I had to go be a pilgrim once more... and am happy to report that still I laughed and clapped and cheered: and look forward to another pilgrimage when next the show comes to a theatre near me!

Oh dear friends, the JOY of sitting watching people in brightly-coloured clothing singing, dancing and generally being Extremely Silly on stage, bringing great joy and laughter to the assembled audience – it's almost beyond words. It also gives me enormous hope, that the state of the world cannot be that parlous if there is money to be made from putting on such spectacles, and theatres full of people will laugh themselves



helpless at the antics of the Killer Rabbit and raise the roof in singing “Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life”...

For those of you who have no idea what I'm talking about, Spamalot is a musical/ stage play “lovingly ripped off from Monty Python and the Holy Grail” – and if you do not know this thing, then I urge you to make its acquaintance without delay: investigate <http://www.montypythonsspamalot.com/>

While shaking helplessly in my theatre seat, I realised that my life, though pleasant enough, contains very few occasions

when I laugh so wholeheartedly: and giving myself up entirely to something that is FUN is, I think, highly necessary for my mental and physical well-being, quite apart from being so very pleasant.

Much of the time I find that I am completely unmoved by that which all around me find hysterically funny: but equally, throughout my life, there have been occasions when I have been helplessly convulsed with laughter and those around me - concerned, poker-faced - are enquiring what on earth is the matter. A sense of the ridiculous is, I feel, a great blessing: and one that I fear is all too rare, especially among Quakers, who maybe have a tendency to Take Life Very Seriously [or do they do all their laughing in private, behind closed doors??] Friends, what course of action should we take to bring more life, joy and silliness into our lives, and to spread it among those of our friends and the wider world around us??

**Mary W**

### Stage

The me-of-then stormed against my death,  
Life in all its liveness gives us a stage.  
When we bow out, exhale the last breath,  
What is there to fear, why feel the rage?  
Either we have played a part well, or ill,  
Live on in our reviews and that is all,  
My energy recycled, the universe's will...  
Or, we're booked to something new; the curtain call  
The briefest pause in the dark before  
The Manager, in whom I hope and trust,  
Has a part for me, if not my dust.

Fear dying, perhaps, to fear death naivety:  
Either curtain down forever or a new Nativity

**PW**



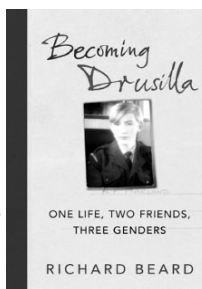
## “Becoming Drusilla” Richard Beard. Vintage U.K. 2009 978-0-099-50773-4 ISBN

I found this book on display in our local library, and am very glad I did. Two long-time friends go on a walking/ camping trip up the Offa's Dyke, across the Cambrian Mountains, then south and west to St David's. Wild, wet, Wales. It's the sort of trip they've done several times before. Richard is a novelist, and Drew is great at motorcycle maintenance, and works in the engine room of a massive ferry. But this time there's a complication. (An)Drew has become Dru(silla).

And the travel narrative, tho' interesting, is secondary to the story of Drusilla's route to gender reassignment in her mid-forties, and Richard's

determination to support his friend and confront his own conflicts and reactions. He describes his own difficulties with honesty and humour, and undertakes lots of research to help his (and our) understanding.

How, why and when did she decide on the drastic operation? How does her experience compare with other transgender people's? How can she/ they cope with hostile reactions from folk they meet? There are no simple answers, but Richard asks the



right sort of questions, and writes in a clear, direct and un sentimental style. One of Dru's fine pencil drawings (*her mechanic's multi-purpose tool on a lanyard, a compass, bangers and mash etc.*) and three short lines about the countryside lead into each chapter. I recommend “Becoming Drusilla” to everyone as a thoroughly worthwhile book.

**Jenny Cox**

*Seconded. A great book for anyone who suspects real people are more complex and interesting than cartoons, and that there is not just one way to be a man, a woman, a friend. Sympathetic but not uncritical of conventional wisdoms.*

**SC**

## What is a safe space?

Many years ago now a couple of friends went to a sex workshop. Both considered themselves very liberal and open minded, and everyone nodded as the facilitator set out the conditions to make this a safe space for the discussion of people's sexual lives and fantasies.

But they were horrified when one person began to outline a sadistic fantasy involving children, and the facilitator blandly asserted that as a 'sex positive safe space', the person speaking could not be challenged on what he was saying – because then it would not be a safe space for them. My friends, I am glad to say, made a few choice observations and left.

What is a safe space is not always clear. Many of us, if we are honest, see it as a space where we are free to say and do



what we feel is reasonable, but other people are not allowed to say and do things we feel are unreasonable. Sometimes that is appropriate, for example, there was a group session run at BYM 2009, which was for people who did not want gay marriage and who needed a space to say so without being challenged. Pastorally, I was glad that was provided, but not compulsory.

So for example QLGf might well see a certain sexual discretion and a certain level of modesty in clothing as appropriate at our events. Nudity, or having your partner on a leash, or in a gimp mask, would probably

not make some other people feel safe. We are much more M+S cords than S+M with cords, after all. But what is appropriate might not be simple to agree. Community does not mean that there will not be conflict and disagreement, what one hopes for is that these will be dealt with in a Quaker way. For me a safe space is being guided by the following ...

*“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 one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”*

*Isaac Penington, 1667*

If someone does something that upsets you in your safe space, how we deal with that affects whether it is safe for any of us.

**KM**

## Dipping a Toe in Interfaith Relations...

Earlier this year I was asked to represent Quakers at the Ministers' Meeting of Churches Together in Hall Green (Birmingham). I accepted hesitantly, and I have found attendance challenging. Most of the others are male, they have an employed status, seem much more certain (*and knowledgeable*) theologically than I am, and as far as I know they are all "straight".

It is one of the few arenas where I am not "out" - but then there hasn't been an occasion when "outing" myself might be required. Nevertheless, I am not sure whether, if asked about my home life, I might be cautious in my response, in the way that used to be second nature ... and that I thought I'd left behind!

It was after one of the meetings, that I came home to find an email which began "Dear Faith Leader..." Not me, I thought... The email was from my friend Chris Dowd of the local Metropolitan Community Church, and it was a proposal to set up an LGBT interfaith group. So far the group is very small, Quakers, MCC, the Pagans, Changing Attitude, a representative of Safra (a Muslim lesbian group), and a "lapsed"



Sikh. We are encountering the difficulty of how you find LGBT people from other faiths, when they mostly have to be secretive.

We co-ran an event with Safra, at which a radical American Islamic scholar spoke about his LGBT-friendly interpretation of the Qur'an. We were really worried that no one would turn up, as we had been so very careful about publicity - fearing that the venue might be picketed by irate Muslims.

As it happened, the turnout was sufficient to make it work, although there were not many people there that I would have known to be Muslim. It was interesting to hear the scholar, Imam Daayiee Abdullah, deconstruct the Gomorrah story in much the same way as our friend Renato Lings. The Imam also talked about anti-gay Hadiths that are the basis for Sharia law, but which contradict the Qur'an. (*Hadiths are sayings of the Prophet, but they do not have the same weight as the Qur'an, which is held to have been directly*

*revealed to Mohammed by Allah.*)

Much of his talk was hard to follow, as I am not sufficiently well-versed in the Qur'an. It was, however, helpful to realise that the same differences in scriptural interpretation exist in Islam as in Christianity.

I was, therefore, looking forward to exploring my dilemmas further with QLGF at Horfield - but I was unable to attend, as I was ill. Since then, I have been to a Family Fun Day run for Islam Awareness Week at one of Hall Green's Anglican churches, and I'm looking forward to a debate to be held as part of Birmingham's LGBT cultural festival, Shout!, entitled "*Is Faith Toxic for Queers?*"

But I'm left with a sense of just dipping a toe in the water. Do I challenge the ministers at Churches Together? How do we make contact with LGBT people in other churches, let alone with LGBT Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, etc? Perhaps the debate will be the turning point - but maybe it will be a forum where people recount how badly they have been treated by their faith communities, with no space for alternative experiences to be heard...

**Gill Coffin**

---

## What is the point of 'inter faith work'?

Some things about Quakers make me roll my eyes to heaven and adopt the same facial expression as St Theresa. One is the way some Friends talk about 'other churches' or 'the other faith groups' as if they were saying 'a basket of puppies and a big warm hug'.

For example, we couldn't

adopt same sex marriage because - pious look - it would 'upset' the other churches. (*Personally, I get quite upset when some of those churches accuse me of being a paedophile, and I wish some Quakers would be as upset about that as they are about a cross word over the scones.*)

Ecumenicism poses its

own specific issues because whatever Quakers say corporately, many Quakers aren't Christians and don't want to be part of any Christian alliance. (*Can I plug From Lima with Love, which entirely explains Quakerism, and how Quakers might see church unity, in terms which are utterly unapologetic but which also translate*

into traditional Christian language.)

In any case, the ecumenical movement suffers from differences between those who see unity as one structure (Catholics), or one alliance (those Anglicans who see local federations with a local leader... a bishop manqué), those who see unity in a common understanding (evangelicals and others who think so long as we all believe in the atonement and the infallibility of scripture we can have any structure we like), those who see unity in a common mission (social action Christians or Billy Graham – he doesn't mind which church he gets people into), and those who see unity as being woolly togetherness in the Spirit. But at least most people in the ecumenical movement are open to the idea that the churches ought not to be rubbishing all of each other, all of the time. Interfaith work does not even start from that premise.

It seems to me that there are several sorts of interfaith agendas. One is the police agenda – make sure the leader-

ship of the different groups talk to each other so if something kicks off, there are lines of communication. So we have a policeman paid to email each other's open days and celebrations round so we can stay talking. Such events tend to skate around most relevant issues but are, on the basis of civility and public order, worth doing.

The LGBT community seems to have a reduced sectarian quotient. Evangelical queers invite Jews, Catholics and Hindus as speakers to their events. There is a feeling that we can get along and cooperate to some extent. We're also very happy to work with purely secular groups that have similar policy goals.

This is part of an observed phenomenon, that we can work together on a specific practical agenda. So when our Baptist MP wants to campaign against stem cells he can get Catholics, Orthodox Jews, Muslims and the like in one room. On the other hand, different groups can coalesce around Palestine, homelessness or drugs.

There is the big society agenda, which is in an atomised and individualistic society, the faith groups however feeble to have networks and communities.

Or there is interfaith work that is serious about education and encounter. And this means going beyond ecumenical politeness. It means meeting, and being exposed to being shocked, bored, offended and upset. It means having time and patience to listen and to defend one's corner mildly. It means sending supported LGBT people and their supporters to meetings and having the discussion.

Such groups won't always work, but sometimes, they build relationships, honesty, understanding, and they can change minds. Such work is an encounter in the real depths. Because anyone I have ever met or read, who seems to me to have a deep authentic spirituality, invariably is open to the idea that other people can reach that depths through a different path.

Or we can bake each other cakes. **SC**

---

### **1. Trip to a new beginning and old haunts**

Something slips in the brain  
in my journeying between  
my two Spirit Homes-

I leave one existence behind  
and cannot release, in that moment,  
the other.

And tickets to ride, passports  
from one sphere to the next  
become lost, confused, blurred  
in the transport from scotia to albion  
Glasgow, Liverpool, Wirral.

Each place claims me  
makes it difficult to let go  
their hold upon my soul

and in the passage "overthwater"  
that invisible barrier between  
Liverpool's edge and Wirral's inertia  
I lose ...  
a slither of myself  
cannot be entirely comfortable  
charging around a ghost museum  
of all my former lives  
all my former selves  
Changing and unchanging.

### **2. Pride of place.**

Liverpool worked a magic  
A meeting of spirit – the challenge  
to oppression and a cry of- "Enough is Enough"  
in Michael Causer's wake.

No more blood, no more self-hatred

No more preaching from pulpits wayside or other side  
 As the hate-mongers gathered  
     bible-bashers, tub-thumpers, placard of doom-  
 carriers  
     an unholy alliance under  
 Victoria's skirts, shielded and warmed by  
 her benign blind gaze-  
 "We do not see Lesbians!"  
 They do not exist – certainly not in England!!"

They were drowned out by the dyke's war-drums  
     the quean's screech, the trannie's testimonies  
     the ordinary queer on the street, gay about town  
     shouting, singing, parading-  
 "We're here, we're queer,  
     we will not live in fear"

All along the route grannies smiled  
 Babies gurgled, children laughed  
 Builders were wolf-whistled then gleefully posed  
 And Liverpool showed its kinder face  
 Knickers freed, untwisted or abandoned!!

### 3. The Pride's eve service

Some had met in the Quaker House  
 All creeds, all queers of Faith  
 Battling on in spite of some our signed-up religions  
 Diktats to be other than we are  
 Finding strength to endure, to comprehend,  
 To seek the essence of the Love at our command  
 The Light of our Inner Being  
 God within, Buddha-nature, Christ-consciousness  
 Sacred Other, Twin- Spirit,  
 Hafiz's heavenly Sufi lovers  
 Compassion of Tara  
 Healing of Earth, goddess-blessed  
 Source of all Life and Love

Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan  
 Sarah and Abraham, Adam and Eve  
 All the ancestors and spirits, daevas, fairies  
 Angels   demons  
 Dark, Light, equal and opposite  
 Praising  
 Praying  
 Celebrating our vision

"It is time to seek your truth  
 Create your own community  
 Be good to each other  
 And do not look outside yourself for your leader...  
 This could be a good time!":-



*'Life and love with Liverpool's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities'*

So the Hopi Elders say  
 In their truth ,our truth  
 In the rainbow of our lives  
 Light seeks like, seeks Spirit, seeks Source  
 And the seeds of our being.  
 our thought,  
 our loins,  
 Spread out against a reddening sky  
 hand to hand  
 dancing the streets  
 of Liverpool, Glasgow,  
 Paris, Moscow,  
 Berlin, Brazzaville  
 Warsaw ,Wellington  
 Havana , Skopje, Beirut  
 Delhi, Karachi  
 New York, Hiroshima....

All cities, all towns and villages  
 gatherings of light and love

Dunblane , Beslan  
 Srebrenica , Sharpeville  
 Warrington, Enniskillen  
 Gaza , Belsen...  
 Grieving, growing in pain and blood

Bring All healing  
 Bring All power  
     of  
 Bright Light and Life  
 Out to the mountains  
     Climbing the hills  
     traversing the rivers  
     high in the trees  
 Breathing  
     Om  
     Alleluia  
     Shalom, Salaam, Shakti  
 tending the wounds

**Derek Read September 2010**

## No Minotaurs!

We should ban straights from QLGF? Could be the wrong change for the wrong reason at the wrong time.

**History:** QLGF has always had an open membership policy. We have never asked people their sexuality or gender but just offered a space which has been welcoming to those who needed it.

**Timing:** Eighteen months after straight Friends worked with us to reach unity on same sex marriage, its a bloody odd time to draw our drawbridge up. We debated this ten years ago, agreed not to change ... and were hardly flooded with straights as a result.

**Relevance:** perhaps we need a policy against Minotaurs. If Gatherings were dominated by straight people affecting the dynamic, I would completely understand the concern.

A half LGBT event is different from a wholly LGBT one and it would only take a few badly behaved straights to be an issue. Badly behaved might be sexist and heterosexist, or more likely, people whose desire to be educated or 'supportive' swamps the purpose of the event.

But in ten years I have heard of one straight person coming, [to a day gathering in Birmingham] and one who wanted to come [to support us in our pre-discussion of same sex marriage... but he was prevented] ... Oh, and we've had a straight facilitator for at least one of our meetings – she was excellent and helped make it a success. That's an average of one straight person every five years



**Verbs not nouns:** its a good principle to sanction behaviour not types of people. I can think of plenty of straight people who might be disruptive but also plenty who would be fine.

**Over purist:** if we are to be helpful to the questioning, to the uncertain, to those who are still in the closet, those who do not identify with our labels... we should be open.

**Potentially old fogeyish:** Straight men go to gay clubs now, partly because they are good places to meet straight women.

If we are reaching out to the confident metrosexual Young Friends, who mix it all up without worrying about it, I hardly think this is the action of a confident and spiritually grounded group.

I also think it would make people of a later generation think twice. A bit paranoid, given that no-one has brought their stag do to a Gathering ... and we would know what to do if they did.

### **Impractical and offensive:**

Who is going to decide who is gay enough? Would the application form include a declaration that "I am sufficiently of a bender to qualify"? First action of every gathering would be to appoint the Sexuality Police. Very Quaker.

**Mixed messages:** we want Supporting Meetings and local friends to help us organise gatherings. Provided they are gay enough that is.

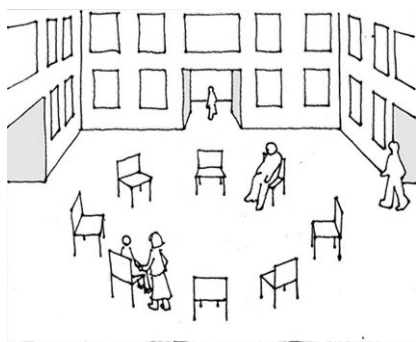
**Biphobic:** all the above I would hold as a gay man. As a bi man, I feel personally threatened by it. Not everyone in QLGF is wild about me having an opposite sex partner but QLGF has been welcoming and sane, without knee jerk skin deep political correctness. Start looking for the right type of queer and who will be out of favour next?

**Ignorance:** Is this a problem in local groups? Are people not coming because they think the meetings are full of straights? I'd like to hear. I think there are other solutions if that is the problem.

A way forward. We add to the statement of purpose that "QLGF gatherings whether open to all or closed to members only, are intended to be LGBT led and LGBT safe spaces and this is important to those attending. We ask those who attend to respect this." This keeps us in the best possible place, a completely open group where in practice, supportive straight Friends only come if we want them to. **SC.**

# Minutes of a Meeting for Worship for Business

held at the QLGF gathering on 23 October 2010



## 3. QLGF Draft Statement of Purpose

QLGF Committee, in its discussion of the roles that the Committee and specifically the Communications Team should fulfil, concluded that its work would be facilitated by greater clarity about the purpose and role of QLGF itself. A draft Statement of Purpose was produced and published for consultation in the Newsletter but no comments were received. The Committee therefore has referred the draft Statement to this business meeting for consideration, amendment and approval. We have considered the draft and some concern has been expressed about the statement that QLGF is open to people of any sexuality. We ask that the Newsletter open a discussion of this matter and that the statement be revised in the light of that discussion. We also ask that reference be made in the Statement to the fun associated with our activities. Some concern has also been raised about the name

'QLGF' and we ask that consideration be given to avoiding the masculine connotations of 'Fellowship'. We refer the resulting draft to our next business meeting.

## 4. Committee and nominations

It was agreed at our Gathering in Spring 2010 to set up a Communications Team and the new team incorporates the posts of Newsletter Editor, Website Editor, Liaison Officer and Publicity Officer. The Team will work flexibly, can cover for one another, and may co-opt members for specific projects. The composition of the Committee is therefore set out as follows:

- Communications team, two, both retiring by Sept 2011
- National contact, one, retiring in 2011.
- Clerks, two
- Gatherings Officers two but one post vacant
- Treasurer One
- Membership One

This arrangement is acceptable to the Gathering.

The Committee has considered the work that each Committee member undertakes and has concluded that the size of the committee is about right. These recommendations being acceptable, we so appoint and thank Sarah for her work. We note that the follow-

ing positions are vacant: Communications Team, two posts; Second Gatherings Officer [and three posts fall vacant this year]. We consider that further work could be done on an ad hoc basis by members and by supporting meetings and local groups. We agree to try this model for one year and invite members to offer to undertake such tasks as they are able.

## 6.1 2011 Subscription rates

The Committee recommends that we maintain our current subscription rates for members for 2011, and increase the subscription for Supporting Meetings to £15 a year or £40 for three years. We agree to this recommendation.

## 6.2 2011 Bursaries budget

The Committee asks for discretion to set a budget for bursaries during 2011 in the light of demand for bursaries and the Fellowship's financial position. We agree to this request.

## 7. Uganda

We have heard of a letter published in Uganda calling for homosexuals to be attacked. We encourage the Communications Team to write to the Ugandan government urging it to protect people from violence.

Signed in and on behalf of the Meeting,

**Robert Card**  
Clerk this time

## A postscript from Bristol ...

The Horfield Gathering was reasonably cheerful. If the definition of a good gathering is one which leaves you more engaged and optimistic than

when you started, it was a good gathering. But a turning point is fast approaching for QLGF as it currently exists.

The Friends gathered

there by and large thought QLGF had a purpose. Interestingly, the majority of women present were enthusiastic members of Quaker Lesbian Group but

they still saw QLGF as having a purpose.

Our committee of eight (*four men, four women*) now has the National Contact, and both Comms people, firmly intending to stand down within a year. There is one Gatherings Officer not two, and he is organising a Gathering in a keen but QLGF wise sparsely populated country. No one stepped forward or suggested anyone else. Without a national contact, the newsletter and website, and our Gatherings, QLGF will not exist as more than a theoretical concept. (*The other committee roles are just as important but they are not up for reappointment right now*).

The Gathering felt that we should do everything possible to encourage people to offer help with 'tasks' – some thought more people would help with tasks than to 'be on the committee'. Local members, the local groups and supporting meetings could help with Gatherings. Friends could do more to contribute timely contributions for the newsletter, write letters to the papers or speak at other people's events. The committee is the servant of the members, not its priesthood.

This is fine and dandy if it happens. It would not make many people stepping forward to make the next couple of years

one of optimism and perhaps even growth. But it raises the question whether the purpose we exist for is one you, and your meeting, believe is important. What do you want us to be for and can you help it happen?

If you sit back and just assume it will happen, the autumn Gathering 2011 will probably be faced with a simple decision – has the time come to lay QLGF down? This isn't a threat, a promise, a guilt trip, or the committee throwing toys out of the pram, none of which are called for. It is a bald statement of the truth as we see it.

**The Comms Team**

---

## Communications team

The communications team is currently supposed to cover the following:

- Producing the newsletter, many members and meetings appreciate a printed document but it can also be supplied on the web and electronically.
- Maintaining a simple website
- Coordinating some media activities such as letters to the papers, press releases around suitable events etc. We are developing some QLGF lines which allow the committee to respond to things without special discernment on each and every occasion. We would be happy for anyone to send a letter to any publication saying QLGF is supportive of gay religious marriage but not all gay people wanted to 'be married'. We would not want someone saying

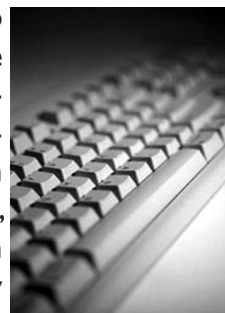
QLGF supports the Severn Barrage, or the repeal of the Act of Settlement, without a proper discernment process.

- Coordinating links with groups, providing speakers etc. Currently this is responding to the odd approach by other people. At one point we had a committee member who went to things every so often and filed reports, which could be done by all sorts of people but someone could help coordinate this.
- Keeping literature under review

### Possible development

Four committee posts are currently done by two people, who have enjoyed doing it enormously, but both of whom plan to leave within the year. We are hunting for one or more

people who can produce the newsletter in its totality (which is editorial, production and currently distribution).



We are happy to discuss what that might involve.

Clearly QLGF can and should embrace a more dynamic and regularly updated web presence. A blog and/or a Facebook page would be useful, and a number of people could have responsibility to update them. Some e-literate people actively chose not to be on Facebook so both is probably the best.

This would on the one hand, be more timely in notifying the 21<sup>st</sup> century members of what is happening, could involve more people inside and outside the Fellowship, and on the other,

provide the printed newsletter with input. My blog guru says one can arrange to draw in material from other online sources but need original material so people still come to your site.

A small and perfectly

formed publicity plan – within the society and outside it, eg prodding people to write for Quaker publications and the like. We can and should encourage more people to link to our web resources as they become

stronger. Liaison with groups needs to be better defined.

If you have any interest in any of this email or write to the editorial address.

SC

---

## QLGF Membership Officer's Thoughts

### Membership

It has been very interesting to note the increase in membership arising from the decision at Yearly Meeting Gathering at York last year [we had 28 new members last year], and that there is still a steady trickle of new members [21 new people have joined us this year].

There have been a few resignations and there is a sizeable number of people who have not renewed for the past two years [*despite a number of reminders being sent*]. Your Committee decided that these latter should be removed from the database, making a loss of 26 names. This raises the question of why people join the Fellowship, what they expect from it, and why they resign – where reasons have been given, they range from “*I need to concentrate on doing fewer things better / in my local area*” to “*I’m transgender and the Fellowship doesn’t offer what I need*”.

On the plus side, 17 people to date have responded positively to the reminder enquiry I sent them, and I think there are more in the pipeline - so all is not bleak and we are obviously getting something right!

### Renewals coming up!

This is the time of year when renewal notices go out, and this



is my wish list ...

1. Could Friends who renew their subs electronically: PLEASE use the bill payment facility rather than the funds transfer one, and PLEASE PLEASE add some sort of marker to say who you are!
2. Please also email me to let know you have paid, and how much. Your Treasurer and I spend far more time than we would like [*or indeed, have!*] trying to sort out from whom payments have come...
3. Please, where possible, renew fairly early on in 2011, thus saving me the task of sending out further reminders, and chasing people by email or telephone...
4. PLEASE let me know that your contact details, especially your email address, have changed!!!

Many thanks to all the wonderful people who do do all these things, and/ or do respond enthusiastically and gratefully to

the reminders!!!

If Friends fail to respond to reminders, they are deemed to have resigned from the Fellowship, and will be removed from the database after two years' failure to renew. If you wish to avoid ceasing to receive our wonderful newsletter, you know what to do...

Mary

### Local Groups

Some new members wish to be put in touch with local groups: where there is one, we are very happy to do so, but where there isn't one, they seem to expect that 'someone else' will do the work of making it happen...

Since joining the Fellowship I have been the catalyst for the formation of two local QLGF groups, (a) because I felt the need for fellowship and support from Friends who understood what it was like to be part of the LGBT community and (b) I wanted to offer to people outside the Religious Society of Friends the opportunity to meet people of faith who did not regard all LGBT people as spawn of the devil.

In Nottingham, where I used to live, I believe those members who are still in the area are in touch with each other, even if they no longer

meet every month. In Edinburgh, where I now live, many of the group members are people with no previous experience of the RSoF, who came along out of curiosity about Quakers, and who have stayed because they are comfortable with the fellowship, the worship, and of course the tea and [sometimes] cake: in some cases, they are now regular attenders at Local Meetings.

Dear Friends - it can be very simple!

1. Get, from myself or Sue, our Contact Person, the contact details of any members of the Fellowship who live in your area and are happy

to be contacted, and get in touch with them.

2. Make a great song and dance in your Local and Area Meetings, and your local LGBT community, about how you want to start a QLGf group, and invite interested people to get in touch with you. It is possible to put ads in gay papers – not always costing money, especially if one advertises as a religious interest group – and that is both an excellent way of reaching other people and doing Quaker outreach.
3. Be prepared to wait a while for anything to happen!

I realise that there are people who wish to be more circumspect about their private lives, and that for people who live in more rural areas it may be harder to meet up – but there is always email and the telephone, and no doubt, for the technologically more advanced, Facebook, Bebo and Twitter ...

Where there's a will, there's a way – if only one stops expecting that "somebody else" will sort it out.

Dear Friends, if you want to have a local group to join, then consider it possible that it won't happen unless you yourself do something about it.

**Love from Mary, your  
Membership Officer**

---

## Exodus – on way out?

The Australian and New Zealand branch of the world's largest ex-gay ministry has been denied charitable status by the New Zealand Charities Commission.

The organisation, Exodus Asia Pacific, a branch of the Exodus Global Alliance (formerly *Exodus International*) had been registered as a charitable organisation in New Zealand since 1991. It had to reregister in 2008 after new regulations governing charities were passed in 2007.

In making its application to the commission, Exodus Asia Pacific, registered as the Exodus Ministries Trust Board, explained its goals were to teach that deviations from heterosexual marriage such as homosexuality were "morally wrong", to counsel homosexuals to live a Christian life so they might be healed and

released from homosexuality, and to counter the message that homosexuality was innate.

The commission noted the weight of expert opinion indicated that homosexuality was not a condition that could or needed to be cured so the above could not be determined to be a public good.

It also found the organisation was engaged in activities beyond the scope of "advancing religion" by which religious groups derive a charitable status. It declined the organisation charitable status on the grounds that its purposes

were not exclusively charitable. "The Applicant has failed to meet an essential requirement for registration as a charitable entity," the commission concluded. Exodus Asia Pacific, which is headquartered in Banyule, Victoria, solicits donations through its website.

The NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby would like to see the organisation's charitable status removed in Australia as well.

"We're opposed to the organisation as a whole," GLRL convenor Kellie McDonald told Sydney Star Observer.

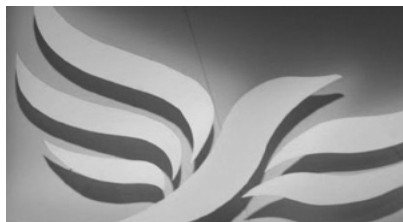


## Liberal Democrat conference supports marriage equality

The UK Liberal Democrat conference has overwhelmingly voted for a motion calling on the UK Government to introduce full equal marriage. The policy includes opening marriage and civil partnership to couples regardless of gender, and removing the requirement to divorce before getting gender recognition. The Scottish Liberal Democrats adopted a similar policy at their conference six months ago. Part of the significance of today's decision is that the Liberal Democrats are in government at UK level, of course with the Conservatives as majority partner. We hope therefore that this decision will influence UK Government policy.

Equal marriage is also supported by the Green Parties of Scotland and of England & Wales. Contenders for leadership of the UK Labour Party also publicly pledged their support for equal marriage.

Here in the UK, the text of the equal marriage motion submitted to next month's UK



Liberal Democrat conference has been published. The motion sets out a first class proposed policy, quoted below. Let's hope the conference adopts it!

*Conference therefore calls on the British government to:*

1. Open both marriage and civil partnerships to both same-sex and mixed-sex couples.
2. To allow approved religious and humanist celebrants to legally solemnise and celebrate same-sex marriage and civil partnerships in places of religious worship.
3. To allow those individuals who wish to seek gender recognition or change their legally recognised gender to remain in their current marriage or civil partnership without changing any legal requirements.
4. To establish a simplistic

process by which any existing civil partnership may be converted into a marriage or vice-versa without the need to dissolve the civil partnership or proceed with a divorce.

5. To automatically recognise all non-UK same-sex marriages as marriage in the UK, and to subsequently remove non-UK same sex marriages from the current schedule which equates them to civil partnerships in the UK.
6. To continue to maintain the schedule equating non-UK same sex civil unions or registered partnerships as civil partnerships in the UK.
7. To add non-UK opposite-sex civil unions or registered partnerships to the schedule equating them to Civil Partnerships in the UK.
8. To openly promote and encourage recognition of same-sex marriage and civil partnerships across the European Union, especially in countries where currently no laws exist.

---

## Stonewall comes out for civil gay marriage ...

After some procrastination, Stonewall issued a statement "We seek to secure marriage for gay people as a civil vehicle on the same basis as heterosexual marriage, available in a registry office but without a mandate on religious organisations to celebrate it. We seek to retain civil partnerships for lesbian and gay people recognising their special and unique status."

The review of Stonewall's position followed its biennial supporter survey in October 2010. Stonewall supporter



surveys are carried out at the beginning of the charity's financial year and are part of their commitment to best practice.

Last February, Stonewall secured a permissive amendment to the Equality Act 2010 to

allow the celebration of civil partnerships in religious premises.

Reports in Pink News suggested that Ben Summerskill, Stonewall boss, had spoken against gay marriage at a fringe event at the LibDem conference. However this was denied and clearly the 'soundings' among supporters announced at the time led to a shift in emphasis.

A spokesperson for Stonewall told the newsletter that Stonewall took soundings on policy from its donors/

supporters, through looking at what new members saw as important and feedback received by staff. Every other year, a formal survey takes place, and staff were drawing up questions on this issue for the next survey, due imminently. Care was being taken to frame those questions to draw out the full range of views.

*“While some lesbian, gay and bisexual people fully support changing civil partnership into marriage, there are others – including particularly some women – who do not want something that is either the same as or synonymous with marriage” according to the statement .”* The spokesperson was not able to name a pro-gay organisation arguing for the abolition of civil partnerships. However, the newsletter has learned, Iceland did choose to replace civil partnerships with same sex marriage without the option.

Based on the assumption

that a large number of cohabiting heterosexuals would take civil partnership up, Stonewall had estimated a cost to the Exchequer of £5bn over ten years. It appears Ben Summerskill had raised this at the fringe meeting, and also he had said combating heterosexual disadvantage was not something Stonewall, a charity, could take a view on as it went beyond its objects.

The spokesperson said that Stonewall had been pleased to support the ‘Alli’ amendment as conversations with Quakers, particularly staff at Friends House, had shown there was clearly a demand. They hoped to hear the outcome of meetings with Equalities Minister Lynn Featherstone, as to what would come of the amendment and similar issues.

*Comment: Quakers certainly could not criticise any organisation which felt it needed to go through a*

*process before reaching a view – we certainly did. It would be interesting to debate how far people who do not marry, who currently have the right, are ‘avoiding a piece of paper’, and how far they are avoiding the baggage of the word marriage. If the former, we might expect not very many would choose civil partnership, if the latter, quite a lot might.*

*In France the PACS is open to same sex and opposite sex couples and the latter have formed a significant proportion of those adopting one. However, the PACS has less rights around adoption and children and is easier to get into and out of than marriage. It therefore offers a cohabiting but not particularly committed opposite sex couple some advantages of marriage without the commitment.*

*It is therefore not a good test for how many opposite sex couples would opt for something closer to marriage in benefits and obligations.*

**The Eds.**

---

## Civil partnership ban defied, but licence refused

‘Equal Love’ campaign opposes exclusion of straight couples.



A heterosexual couple, Tom Freeman and Katherine Doyle, were refused a civil partnership at Islington Register Office in London this morning, Tuesday, 9 November. The registrar cited the legal ban on opposite-sex civil partnerships as the reason for the refusal.

Commenting on the refusal, Katherine Doyle (26, postgraduate student) said: “The

*refusal was expected but it is still very frustrating. We are committed to each other and really want a civil partnership. We don’t like the patriarchal traditions of marriage and don’t want to be called husband and wife. Tom and I see each other as equal partners. That’s why civil partnerships appeal to us. They are more egalitarian and better reflect our relationship.”*

Tom and Katherine’s application today is part of the new **Equal Love** campaign, which seeks the repeal of the twin prohibitions on gay civil marriages and heterosexual civil partnerships. Same sex couples

will apply for a marriage and opposite sex couples for a civil partnership.

The Equal Love campaign is organised by the gay rights group OutRage! and coordinated by the human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell.

Public attitudes have shifted strongly in favour of allowing gay couples to marry.

[A Populus opinion poll](#) in June 2009 found that 61% of the public believe that: “Gay couples should have an equal right to get married, not just to have civil partnerships.”

Only 33% disagreed.

## American Protestant Support for Gay Marriage Rises

Pew Research has been researching the pews again. Forty-two percent of Americans favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally, up from 37 percent last year, according to the Pew Research Center's latest survey. Notably more white mainline Protestants and white Catholics now favor allowing same-sex marriage than oppose it – another first for the Pew Research Center.

Forty-eight percent of Americans are now against same-sex couples marrying, a dip from 54 percent the previous year.

White evangelical Protestants, meanwhile, remain overwhelmingly opposed to gay



marriage. Seventy-four percent are against it and 20 percent favor it. A majority of black Protestants also continue to oppose gay marriage. *[I saw an interesting analysis which showed that blacks were more likely than whites to oppose gay marriage but this was entirely explainable by their religious affiliations. Blacks were per se more supportive of employment equality for gays than whites of similar denominations.]*

Evangelicals are also more likely than any other religious group to consider same-sex marriage as very important to their vote in the upcoming midterm elections. Support overall for gays in the military is high, the poll also showed. Sixty percent of Americans favor allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military while only 30 percent oppose it.

Protestants are also more likely to support gays serving openly in the military (52 percent) than oppose it (37 percent). Evangelicals, meanwhile, are more likely to stand against it (47 percent) than favor it (43 percent).

---

## Update ...

Iceland voted for same sex marriage, 49 to 0 with 14 absentions, June 2010. The former civil partnership law was repealed and replaced with a gender neutral marriage law.



One of the first couples to take advantage was Iceland's openly gay Prime Minister, **Johanna Sigurdardottir**, who immediately officially married her long-term partner, **Jonina Leosdottir**.

Civil unions for same-sex couples were first approved in Iceland back in 2002, which gave gay couples the same rights and benefits as married heterosexual

couples. It was under this new law that Ms Sigurdardottir and Ms Leosdottir first formalised their relationship, now transformed into a marriage under the new law.

Ms Sigurdardottir, 68, who came to power in February 2009, has lived with writer Ms Leosdottir, who is in her fifties, for many years.



Iceland, a very secular and liberal country, legalised homosexuality in 1940. In 1992, the age of sexual consent – for mutually consenting individuals, gay and heterosexual – was set at age 14. The same year,

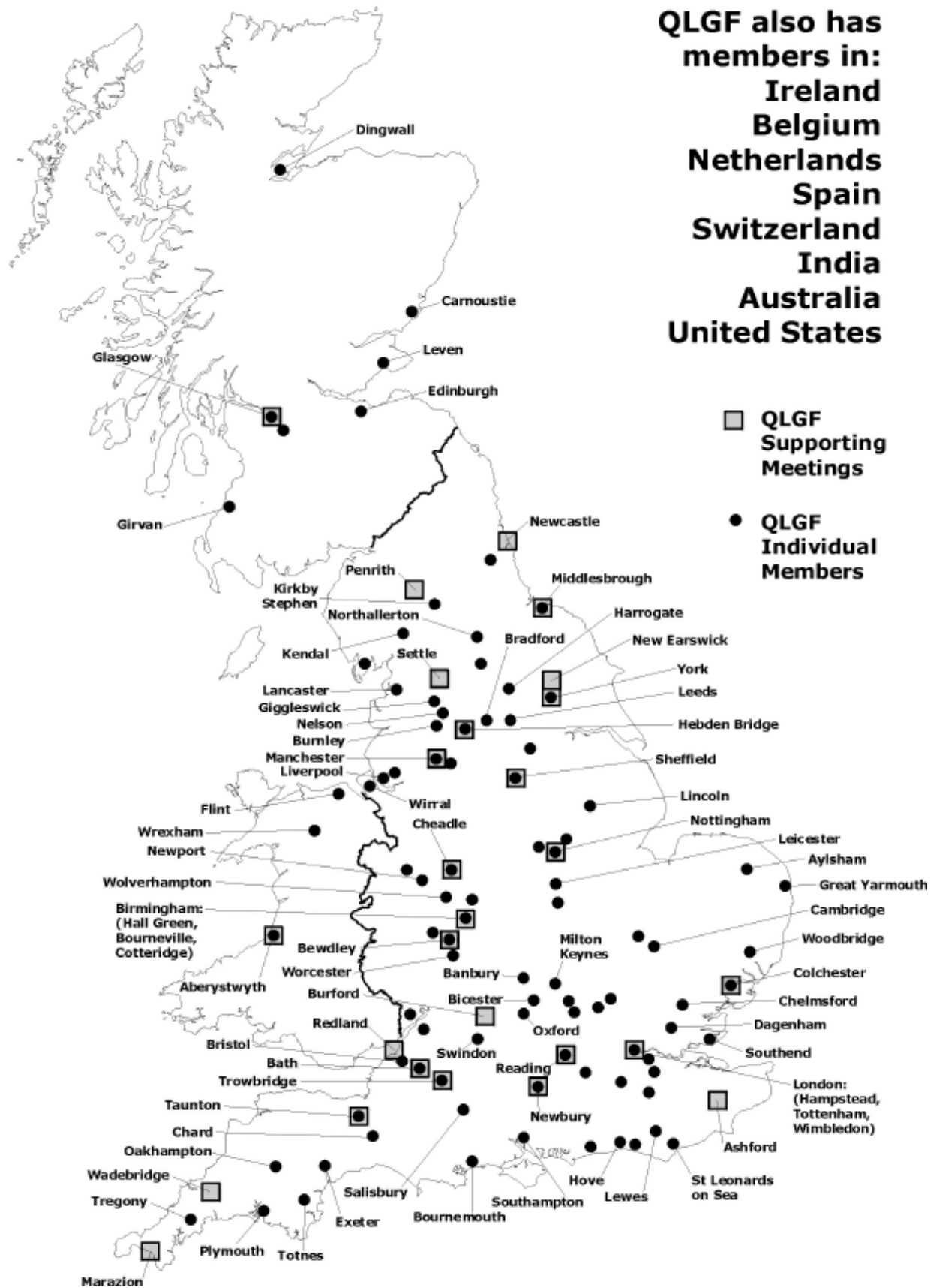
discrimination in goods and services on account of sexual orientation became illegal, as did threats, attacks, mockery or defamation on the same grounds. Civil partnerships became legal in 1996.

The country's capital, Reykjavik, has its own gay scene, despite the relatively small population and a pride parade takes place in the city every August. Ms Sigurdardottir is the world's first – and to date, only – openly gay head of government.

Ten countries, Mexico City, and seven jurisdictions in the States, allow gay marriage; eighteen countries, four Australian states, nine American states and various other bits and pieces have a civil partnership law.

# QLGF in Great Britain:

QLGF also has members in:  
 Ireland  
 Belgium  
 Netherlands  
 Spain  
 Switzerland  
 India  
 Australia  
 United States



[www.qlgf.org.uk](http://www.qlgf.org.uk)