

Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

May 2026

No. 440

Meetings for Worship

Every Sunday 10:15am at the Abingdon Community Support Service (Abbey Centre), Crabtree Place, off Audlett Drive.

Thursday **14th** May 7:30pm in the Garden Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street.

This is a temporary change; in June we will revert to the first Thursday.

Woodbrooke offers online meetings for worship on Zoom at various times during week. For a timetable and the link to the Zoom room, visit <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/worship/>.

Other Forthcoming Meetings

Further information about these meetings is on the inside pages of this issue.

Saturday 9th May	10:30—3pm	Area Meeting, Faringdon Meeting House
Friday 15th May	7:30pm) Becoming Friends: session 1, Dorothea's Room,
Saturday 16th May	2:30pm) St Ethelwold's House
Saturday 16th—Sunday 17th May	Various times	St Edmund 850th anniversary events in Abingdon (various venues)
Sunday 17th May	After MfW	Learning Sunday
Saturday 23rd May	2—4pm	Forest Foxes, Hill End

Quaker Outreach in Abingdon on Saturday 11th April

From Jenny Carr:

Clubs & Societies Day

Every year, Abingdon Town Council holds a Clubs & Societies Day to enable local organisations to display information about themselves and tell others in the community what they do. I know that over the years I have enjoyed going to see what interests I might take up. It takes place in six locations in the town centre, so is easily accessible. Last year we had a table and it was good to be part of the event. This year we were among 57 community groups taking part on Saturday 11th April. Once again we had a table in the lovely Roysse Room, which seems to attract quite a few people as a venue. We were located next to the Peace Group which seemed somewhat more congruent than last year's experience of the Canoe Club (although that was also fun).



We set out plenty of leaflets and had our lovely Quaker banner as a backdrop. We had all sorts of reactions from the public from those who resolutely stride past to those who might be interested and want to ask more. One person from Manchester was very pleased to talk to us. This came less from an interest in Quakers than from her attending numerous demonstrations where there were always Quakers! The simple flier with information about the details of our Meetings for Worship seemed the most popular.



Left to right: Margaret, Jenny, Tracy and Anita. Previous page: Kate, Margaret and Chris. See page 12 for another photo.

Thank you to all those who helped on the day: Johan and Roger, who helped set up the table and take things down at the end of the day; Chris, Kate, Margaret and Tracy who helped at the table; Anita who came to support; and the friendly visits we received from Lorraine, Richard, Tim, Marcela and Alma. It was so rewarding to work together in such a warm, friendly way with the common purpose of disseminating information about Quakerism and our Local Meeting. It was interesting to see former connections taken up and new people met amongst other organisations there, as well as the general public. Again, Clubs & Societies Day seemed an important and valuable way for Quakers in Abingdon to have a recognised presence in the community.

The Mayor's Civic Service

The Mayor's Civic Service took place a short time after the end of the Clubs & Societies Day in the Roysse Room. It was by invitation only due to the limited capacity of the venue. I was invited, along with Marcela Teran (accompanied by Tim and Alma) as we had been part of the working group to set up the Abingdon Multifaith & Belief Forum. The theme was 'Celebrating Inclusivity, Community and Service', and the service very much followed the general tenet of the working group of including all faiths and none.

The service was led by the Mayor, Cllr Rawda Jehanli. A Christian prayer by Gwen Bevington was followed by an Islamic prayer from Dr Hamid Al Shejni. We sang 'When I needed a neighbour were you there?' A Baha'i prayer was given by Susie Howard, followed by a Hindu prayer from Akansha Bhattacharyya. I read out a short summary about Quaker Faith from the Britain Yearly Meeting website. Rosalind Pearmain led us in an introduction to Heartfulness Meditation. Young Voices featured two young women known to the Mayor: Seren Shepherd-Loxton and Yasmin Jehanli (her

daughter). There was a filmed extract from 'The Human Family' by Maya Angelou. The powerful message in this poem is a reminder that, despite our differences, 'We are more alike than we are unlike' (<https://allpoetry.com/Human-Family>). After the Mayor's closing speech, there were concluding Christian prayers from Gwen Bevington. After the service, we were invited to refreshments in the Old Magistrates Court.

This Civic Service was quite different from the more usual traditional Christian one. By including so many other different faiths, the stress was very much on the theme of celebrating inclusivity, community and service. I was glad to be invited to take part and give a summary of what Quakers are about. This is the passage that I read:

Quaker faith is a search for truth.

Quakers vary in their beliefs. Many are Christian. Some follow other faiths and there are some who are atheists.

Quakers believe that there is 'that of God in everyone'. All people can have a connection with God. All people are valuable and should be treated with love and respect.

Quakers have a long history of working for peace, disarmament, prison reform, the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage and much more.

We often sum up Quaker belief and attitudes by telling others about our four 'testimonies' of simplicity, truth, equality and peace.

Challenging Times, Sustaining Quaker Community with Ben Pink Dandelion

Jenny Carr shares her reflections on a thought-provoking course at Charney Manor in February.

There were eleven of us on the course, some from OSAM, including our Friend Esther Peacock, and others from the rest of the country. It was a wonderful course to take part in, with Ben leading us so well in an exploration of Quakerism in which the spiritual side was emphasised, as well as the need for change to enable the spiritual side to be nurtured and deepened.

The current state of religion in Britain

In the introductory session we looked at our reasons for coming on the course and what might hinder us from benefitting from the weekend. The next session addressed religion in Britain and the reasons for its decline. For the first time, less than 50% of the population professes to be Christian, although a lot of people will say they are spiritual rather than religious. Only 10% say they belong to a church, with 6% attending weekly. More than 50% of funerals have no religious element. Among Quakers, there is a huge variation in beliefs. Ninety percent of Quakers come as adults.

The conclusions of Ben's study are that belief is not a central part of each person, but rather it is a *belief story* which can change to make sense of things. We are Quakers in our particular form of worship, conduct of business meetings and in the way we deal with each other and the world within our linguistic system. We can be too dogmatic about being uncertain (a 'perhaps' theology?) or maybe a collective relationship with something beyond ourselves, such as God. In secular terms, we can perhaps express Quakerism that it is 'to maximise the common good'.

Reflecting on the state of our own Meetings

We looked at our own Meetings, whether we were thriving or not, and how our sense of Quakerism might have changed over the past five to 15 years according to our life circumstances. We looked at our vision of a Quaker community. A great deal emerged from this. A few examples are: no-one is excluded; we look after ourselves and others in friendship; simplicity in structures and expressions of faith; informal socialising; like-mindedness and like-heartedness; strong Eldership and pastoral care; and openness to be led by the Spirit.

We then looked at what is getting in the way of this vision. Hindrances include strict adherence to Quaker rules; family responsibilities; an older population; weak leadership; exclusivity; insular and restrictive views; a lack of energy or experience to handle complex situations; and a lack of real vision. They can be exacerbated by bad behaviours; lack of responsibility; negativity; unwillingness to be involved or eldred; inflexible views; legal responsibilities for a building; difficulty in handling relationships; and a lack of boundaries. For the next session, we were asked to bring a Quaker reading that gives us hope and delight to share during worship.

Rethinking roles

In Britain Yearly Meeting, there are currently 11,000 members in nearly 500 local meetings, mostly in England. Membership has been falling since 1990. The number of local meetings has increased but they are smaller, and so we are trying to do too much with fewer people. With 15,000 roles to fill across the country we need a different system.

The monthly Area Meetings in Pendle Hill, Ben's area, have an attendance of 17 out of 30. They last an hour and a quarter and are followed by a two-hour lunch. There is a Presiding Clerk with a Clerk in Process who takes the minutes. It is important that the Clerk is confident and clear, with authority from the Meeting in contrast with a lack of trust in discernment. Ben encouraged us that anything is possible and to try it. He thinks that fewer Business Meetings can lead to more problems and longer meetings. Also, not everyone is suited to be Clerk; other roles may be more appropriate and for different lengths of time.

Rethinking the nature of 'place'

Quakers are no longer dynastic and family-based or 'visibly Quaker'. There can be uncertainty over what the Meeting is about. There are 400 Meeting Houses, half of which are lived in. So, practical problems and money considerations can drive the Meeting.

Quakerism is a way of deepening our spiritual journey through worship which we can do anywhere at any time. Selling Meeting Houses could release a great deal of energy and enable us to employ someone. For example, in one Local Meeting in Cincinnati the pastor is paid, speaks for ten minutes ahead of the unprogrammed worship, and does pastoral care and a lot of outreach. Woodbrooke has had to go online with more people taking courses. A change is needed to accommodate membership that is not tied to a particular geographical area. Online worship from Woodbrooke and Glenthorne has led to a thriving close-knit community with no business needed, only appropriate pastoral care. Indeed, our own Local Meetings can be blended.

Being welcoming

We also explored how we might encourage, rather than discourage, groups such as newcomers, people on low incomes, children and young people. We can make clear our emphasis on the direct relationship that the individual can have with God, but we also need clarity in explaining our practices: what we do and do not do. On the pastoral side, we care for each person.

Regarding membership, since Quaker discernment is a spiritual process, people will have a whole range of reasons and beliefs for coming. Membership as outlined in the current (fifth) edition of *Quaker Faith & Practice* is a commitment to the essential elements of Quaker worship. In Pendle Hill Area Meeting, the discernment process now involves two visits. This allows a greater understanding of how the individual affirms what the Meeting stands for and their willingness to contribute to it.

The four key elements of Quakerism outlined by Ben:

1. We can all have a direct connection with the Spirit which can be cumulative and includes a sense of respect for everyone.
2. We have developed a form of worship to keep that connection.
3. As a group led through this encounter, we have strong systems of discernment, trying to be led by God, however long it might take.
4. We have a particular way of life which reflects the other three: namely, our testimony in the world and a collective faith of worship and witness together.



Above: The beauty and peace of Charney Manor. In the photo, my room in the top right-hand corner has wonderful stone-mullioned windows.

Abingdon Quaker Matters

Learning Sunday: Reflections on Yearly Meeting

Sunday 17th May after Meeting for Worship.

The theme of British Yearly Meeting this year is 'Community'. Our Learning Sunday will be an open session where everyone is invited to share thoughts and reflections on any aspects of Yearly Meeting.

The session will be followed by a bring and share lunch.

Becoming Friends

Twenty-two Friends responded to the invitation to join this course. Two parallel groups are set to meet once a month at St Ethelwold's House, starting on Friday 15th May at 7:30pm and Saturday 16th May at 2:30pm, on the topic 'Advices and Queries'. Thereafter, the meetings will be held on the third Friday of each month and the Saturday immediately following. There will be no meetings in August or December.

The Friday evening group is full, but there is still a possibility of joining the Saturday afternoon group. Speak to anyone on the Spiritual & Pastoral Care Group (SPCG) for details.

Monthly Appeal: Asylum Welcome

From Richard Smart:

Asylum Welcome offers information, advice and practical support to asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants living in Oxfordshire. It helps adults, young people and families to feel safe, respected and understood as members of our diverse community. The range of services provided includes education and employment support, visits to foreign nationals in prison, legal immigration advice, domestic abuse support and recycled bicycles (through the Sanctuary Wheels service).



My own involvement with Asylum Welcome is through Sanctuary Hosting, a very important branch of Asylum Welcome. It is run by volunteers who offer temporary or permanent accommodation from just a weekend to a year. If, for whatever reason, the arrangement does not work out or the host needs their house back, Sanctuary Housing will find alternative accommodation for the guest. They also help with bus passes, laptops, money and advice on job seeking, which are also part of the overall package of support offered by Asylum Welcome. Volunteers receive support from attending regular peer support meetings. I myself have two spare rooms and volunteered to host about a year ago. Since then, I have hosted an Eritrean couple, various Sudanese, an Iranian and a Cameroonian; some of their stories are heartbreaking. I hope people with a spare room will consider offering it in the same way.

With the Borders and Immigration Bill creating a more hostile environment, asylum seekers need help even more.

This year marks 30 years of Asylum Welcome. Thanks to financial support from local people, they have been able to offer warmth, dignity and practical support to people seeking sanctuary in Oxfordshire for three decades. To those who have supported them over that time they say: 'Thank you for being part of a community that chooses welcome, even in difficult times.'

You can donate in these ways:

- **Cash** when the appeal is made after Meeting for Worship on 3rd and 17th May. 'Generic' Gift Aid forms should be available if you are a UK taxpayer.
- **Online** — **card**: <https://www.asylum-welcome.org/>
- **Online** — **CAF account**: <https://cafonline.org>.
- **Online banking**:
Sort code 08-92-50: Co-operative Bank
Account no. 65026773: Asylum Welcome Reg Ch 1092265 (AWADS)
- **Cheque** payable to Asylum Welcome. Send it to Asylum Welcome, Unit 7, Newtec Place, Magdalen Road, Oxford, OX4 1RE.

Thank you.

Asylum Welcome is a registered charity, no. 1092265, and a company limited by guarantee, no. 4361627.

Around the Area and Region

Area Meeting

Saturday 9th May 10:30—3:30, Faringdon Meeting House.

Meeting for Business will take place in the morning as normal. At the time of writing the topic of the afternoon's spiritual nurture session was not yet available.

Refreshments will be provided but, as is customary, please bring your own lunch.

Forest Foxes

Saturday 23rd May 2—4pm, Hill End Outdoor Education Centre.

Quaker-organised adventure, connection and friendship around a fire and in the trees for 11–14 year olds. Adult Friends are also welcome: please contact juliad@quaker.org.uk by Tuesday 19th May to confirm attendance.

Nurturing Children's Spirituality

Saturday 6th June 1—5pm, Oxford Meeting House.

Julia Dover is hosting an enlivening afternoon to explore ways of supporting the innate spiritual connection that children have. It is also an opportunity for parents and volunteers from across OSAM to share experiences and ideas. Run by national Children and Young People Trainers Naomi Richards and Ellie McCarthy, the session is relevant for OSAM Friends who care for children and young people, whether as parents, membership of CYP committees, or involvement with Children's Meetings or other Quaker initiatives for children and young people.

Please confirm attendance (to juliaD@quaker.org.uk) by Friday 29th May and indicate whether you will need childcare (with ages of children).

In Search of a Clerk to Trustees at Charney Manor; Also Gardeners

From Deb Arrowsmith, Clerk to the Board of Trustees:

Charney Manor is our local, Quaker owned and run residential retreat and conference centre, open year-round to groups hosting a variety of spiritual, literature, music, leisure and business training courses. We have a small and dedicated professional staff continuing to build back stability and success following the disruptive years of the pandemic. In January 2024 we became a charitable incorporated organisation with a separate trading company.



We are also rebuilding our own programme of Quaker and interfaith courses and continuing the restoration of our gardens and grounds. We've made huge progress in the last few years and we want to go on offering this unique and inspirational place to the benefit of all — so we need your help.

Clerk to Trustees

We are looking for an additional trustee with administration experience to become Clerk of our Board of Trustees. Trustees meet four to six times a year at Charney Manor and on Zoom. Good listening and recording skills all that is required.

I've been a trustee for six years and Clerk for three. I've found working with staff and trustees really worthwhile; a positive contribution to make to this amazing place. The collaborative approach to work we have based on Quaker ways of respect and listening means a great deal to me and I will continue to support Charney: you'll find me deep among plants and vegetables from now on!

Volunteer gardeners

Summer is coming, the kitchen garden is planned, waiting to be planted and we'll need all the help we can get to pick, harvest and process for the kitchen — and reduce food miles to food metres! It's a beautiful, peaceful place to tend plants and watch the garden grow, even for just a few hours.

To express your interest...

If you feel it's time to grow with Charney Manor we'd welcome your support. For an informal chat and an invitation to visit us and meet other Trustees please contact the current Clerk to Trustees, Deb Arrowsmith, at deb@growing-concern.co.uk.

Charney Manor website: <https://www.charneymanor.com/>

Upcoming Quaker courses at Charney Manor

For details, visit our website:

25th–29th May: *Experiencing Shakespeare* — John Lampen

29th–31st May: *Quakers and the afterlife* — Rhonda Riachi

5th–7th June: *Unfolding and enfolding: a creative retreat* — Philip and Zelig Gross

14th–16th August: *What does the Earth want?* — Paul Hodgkin, supported by Alex Wildwood

2nd–3rd September: *What on Earth... are we doing with Quaker gardens?* — Deb Arrowsmith

4th–6th December: *Healing stories of separation relaxation, reflection and renewal* — Alex Wildwood, supported by Judy Roles

From the Wider Quaker Community

The Quaker Tapestry Museum Reopens

From the Quaker Tapestry website: <https://www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk/>:

The Museum will be open for visitors on Wednesdays from 10am to 4pm until September, staffed by volunteers from the local Quaker community and from Kendal.

Admission will be free, though donations are welcomed. The Museum encourages visitors to bring any small-scale textile-based handcrafts (such as embroidery, quilting, knitting and crochet) to work on in the communal area of the exhibition room.

Quaker Family History Society: Spring Meeting

Saturday 16th May 10:30–5, Sibford School and Sibford Meeting House.

The Quaker Family History Society was formed in 1993. It is an external body recognised by Britain Yearly Meeting and is a member of the Federation of Family History Societies. The programme for the day includes an optional guided walk through the villages and talks including one by Tim Marshall on Quaker clockmakers (the earliest Quakers in the Sibfords met in the house of clockmaker Thomas Gilkes). For further information, visit https://qfhs.co.uk/?page_id=286.

World Quaker Day 2026, Sunday 4th October: Let Peace Be Among Us

Sunday 4th October.

‘Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy’ (Hebrews 12:14).

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) is planning a worldwide online Meeting for Worship on World Quaker Day, bringing together Friends across borders, time zones, and Quaker traditions with a shared focus on peace.

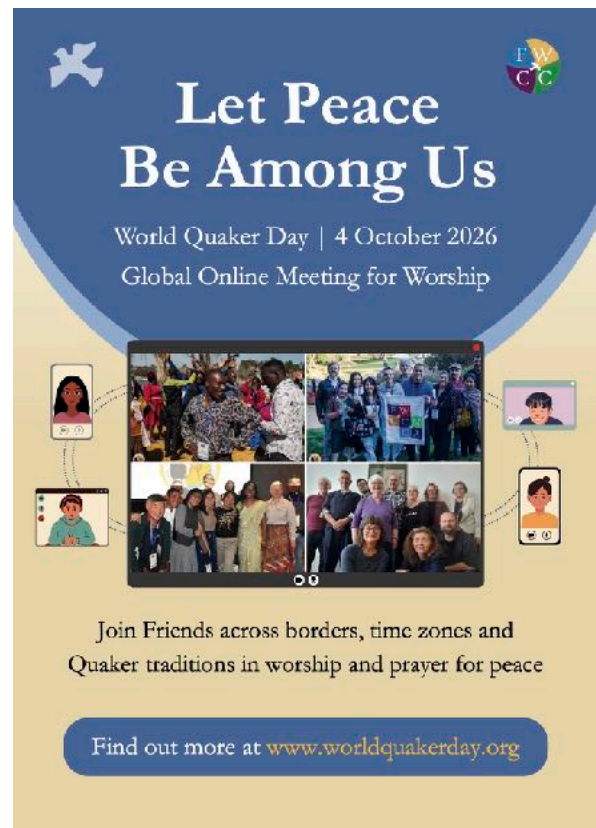
Further updates will be available on this page or in our monthly e-newsletter, *Friends World News*.

You can find useful materials and ways to take part in World Quaker Day at <https://fwcc.world/world-quaker-day-2026-theme-and-materials-announced-let-peace-be-among-us/>. They include Thee Quaker Podcast’s recent episode featuring General Secretary Tim Gee, ‘Why Are Quakers Pacifists?’, and interviews with FWCC’s Clerk Clare Scott Booth and Assistant Clerk Esther Mombo, in which they discuss the connection between women’s leadership in faith communities and peace-building.

Suggestions for activities include:

- Share a message of peace in a sermon, all-age worship or children’s session exploring what the Bible says about peace.
- Organise a meeting for learning about the Quaker testimony to peace.
- Plan a ‘Pause for Peace’ or silent vigil in a public space.
- Sing any of the tunes from the World Quaker Songbook (<https://fwcc.world/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Song-Book-ONLINE.pdf>) related to the theme of peace.

(Text adapted from the FWCC website.)



Local Events of Quaker Interest

Abingdon Peace Group

The group continues to hold a **vigil** from 8.15–8.45am every Monday (except Bank Holidays) in front of the war memorial on Abingdon High Street (in the triangular space known as ‘The Square’ at the bottom of Bath Street). There are now potentially ten people taking part, four of whom are Quakers. See the photo on the next page.

Bombers continue to fly from **Fairford** in Gloucestershire to Iran. CND and Stop the War organised a larger demonstration against this on 25th April. If you wish to be kept informed of future events, please add your name to the Peace Group email list by emailing abingdonpeace@gmail.com.

The annual **lantern floating** will take place at St Ethelwold's House on Hiroshima Day, Thursday 6th August, which this year coincides with our monthly Thursday evening meeting.



The weekly peace vigil in Abingdon

Abingdon Carbon Cutters

Instead of a meeting this month, botanist John Killick will lead a biodiversity walk along the Ock Path on Wednesday 20th May. Meet at 7:20pm on the pavement outside St Helen's Church in West St Helen Street for a 7.30pm start. Suitable footwear is recommended. If you plan to come, please email carbon.cutters@gmail.com.

Cakes and Ale: A Celebration of St Edmund of Abingdon

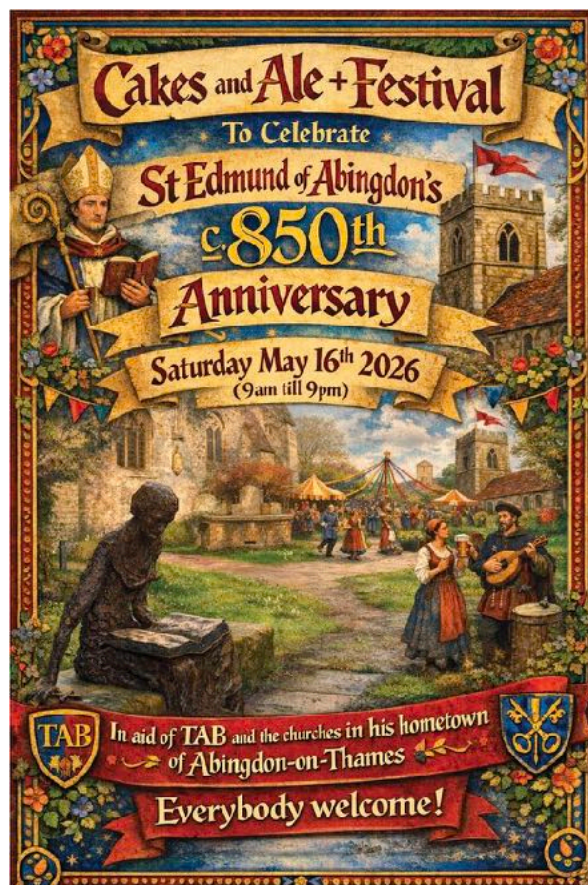
Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th May, various times and locations in Abingdon.

This special festival in honour of St Edmund of Abingdon's 850th anniversary will both raise his profile in his hometown and also raise funds for The Abingdon Bridge and churches in the town.

A very full programme of events has been planned including talks, circle dancing, a cake stall, Morris dancing, art exhibitions, a piano recital, a quarter peal by the bell ringers of St Nicolas' Church and a ceilidh. A commemorative ale has even been brewed by the Loose Cannon brewery.

The weekend will close with a special choral evensong in St Helen's Church at 5:30pm on Sunday 17th May.

The programme is available at <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Cakes-Ale-v10-16th-May.pdf>.



Among Abingdon Friends

Poem of the Month

From the Poetry Group

April's theme of 'folly' yielded examples ranging from the baboon who thought he could fly to the sun to folly in love and the folly of war. However, we should not forget that folly can conceal real wisdom: it's only the Fool who can speak uncomfortable truths to the King with impunity. Once again, we have chosen to share one of Iain's own poems with you — on the folly of the talentless poet who outsources his poetic creativity to an AI (needless to say, this wasn't the case with the poem you're about to read!):

Ghost Poet

Oh, write me a poem, chatGPT.
Just give me a poem, I'll say it's by me.
I don't really care if the lines come out daft—
No way I'll be arsed to study the craft.

Let clichés flood out like whispers at dawn,
Or echoes of greatness from which you were born.
You can fake Shakespeare, or Byron, or Milton.
For these are the bards your parameters are built on.

But I have no talent, no literary skill—
To read all the classics just makes me feel ill.
By using your verse, most humans I'll fool,
For they won't suspect that you are my tool.

So write me a poem, chatGPT
Write me a poem, or two, or three
My fans are on Facebook, hungry for more
So be my ghost poet, churn 'em out by the score.

Iain Strachan

And Finally...

This image popped up on the editor's Facebook feed recently, causing both amusement and incredulity. George Fox stroking a *gerbil*? Clarification was provided in a comment on the post by Quaker theologian Rhiannon Grant: '...it's AI. It was named as such in the context in which I first saw it — a talk about the uses and risks of AI in academic work, given at the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies student day held in Birmingham recently.' In any case, as noted in another comment, gerbils only became popular as pets in the UK in the mid-20th century, so the image should be readily identifiable as a fake. Other images may be more deceptive...



Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: May Rota

3rd	Jenny	Laura
10th	Eryl	Richard
17th	Alan	Judy
24th	Chris	Clark
31st	Rosie	Sally
On standby	Anne	Auriel

Next Month...

Please send your contributions for the June issue (in words and/or pictures) to the editors by **Monday 25th May**. Thank you.



Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting

<https://abingdonquakers.org.uk> | <https://www.facebook.com/AbingdonQuakers/>

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