

# Ireland Yearly Meeting report

## 18<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2018

### Limerick

Ireland Yearly Meeting was held in Limerick this year for the first time ever. Limerick friends organised everything superbly and made everyone who attended feel truly welcome. The venue, Limerick Institute of Technology, was perfect, with sleeping accommodation at the nearby student village.

The theme was “**Discerning and Living our Testimonies Together**” and we all learned a great deal during the five days of the event with a programme so packed with activities that we hardly had time to breathe. Sessions, lectures, reports and small groups - meeting for discussion and spiritual refreshment, Bible study and shared worship - filled our time. Historical tours took place on Friday, with a traditional band and dancing on Saturday evening. It all concluded on Sunday at Limerick Meeting House with a final meeting for worship followed by lunch. There was a positive glow about the whole event.

#### History

We heard about the history of Limerick Friends who have been there since 1655. Hiram Wood told of their mixed fortunes beginning with persecution and imprisonment and followed by two centuries of considerable commercial success and philanthropic activity. A 20<sup>th</sup> century decline ended in rebirth with a lovely new meeting house built in 1977, and the current meeting, though small, is very lively. Hiram will be publishing his book on the subject next year. This year he produced a new booklet on the Limerick Quaker Burial Ground and Seán McCrum launched a booklet on the history of Temple Hill Burial Ground, Dublin. During YM the Historical Committee had success selling their numerous publications.

Social action was the major theme running through so many of the events:

David Morton from Bessbrook, for instance, gave a moving account of the work of Quaker Service in Belfast, which runs both Quaker Cottage and Quaker Connections, supporting people going through difficult times. Connections provides over 50 ‘befrienders’ to prisoners and their families. They reach right into the heart of the prisons, into the visitors’ room, onto the landings and even into the cells. Though they are not all Quakers, they do work in our name. Quaker Cottage brings hope and help to mothers and children from both sides of the divide. David’s presentation was vivid and demonstrated how love can work magic in dark places.

There were interesting reports on FWCC from Simon Lamb, and from the Youth Co-ordinator, Carolyn Ritchie, about the activities with young people. Simon spoke of a medical clinic built in Burundi largely financed by money collected by Friends in Ireland, and a further collection was subsequently held for this cause after meeting for worship on Sunday. This was the second reference to Burundi at YM as a film, about making peace there after the mass genocide, was also shown.

We also heard of work with refugees. In Limerick a centre has been established in an unused Methodist building where English classes are given by Geraldine Grubb, and lots of other services by lots of other volunteers. Vickie Lynch the Methodist representative to YM, described the work in detail.

Seán O'Flynn, a retired secondary teacher from Cork Meeting, told of his work with refugee children at the Direct Provision Centre on Kinsale Road, Cork, where 350 people live, virtually as prisoners as they have no money of their own. Little things, like providing laptops and giving them money for the bus, make all the difference in their lives. Giving the kids a hand with their homework has not only helped them but has given him back an identity that he lost when he retired. It's a win-win situation

Seán also spoke at the Ministry and Oversight session on the subject of Friends today. Irish Friends, he told us, are in a state of paralysis: we are indecisive, hampered by slow-moving committees, virtually invisible in the wider community and too often silent on issues. He tried to explain this both historically and in terms of the way the world has changed in our own times, and he forcefully encouraged us to 'come out'. His talk was spirited, witty and challenging, and there was much laughter when he harangued us about our funny ways and foibles. In a way, we did 'come out' the following day when YM accepted proposed changes to the regulations to allow same-sex marriage to take place in Quaker meetings for worship.

Routine business hardly got a look in but the YM Treasurer's report noted that we had a deficit of €12,000 and that YM may have to be registered as a company limited by guarantee for legal and insurance purposes. We were told about the new regulations on Data Protection. But we were soon back hearing about our testimony on integrity from Natasha Harty from Cork. She defined integrity as honesty, health, wholesomeness, goodness right through to the core. We live in an age of untruth, she told us, and there is a woeful lack of integrity in the world today. Food is one of the casualties: it lacks needed nutrients and, according to Natasha, the rise in numbers of special needs children is a direct result of the state of our food, water and environment.

Our testimony on Peace also had a place. During the half hour of worship on Friday morning, Helen Haughton faced the meeting and spoke about her concern for peace. She had dreamed that Ireland would declare itself to be a 'Country of Peace'. She spoke passionately and encouraged everyone to promote this concern by lobbying those in power: eg. the President, TDs and MPs. She would also like to see other countries follow suit and declare themselves to be a 'Country of Peace'. Next day members of the YM Peace Committee and others met with Helen and proposed that a threshing meeting be held in Dublin in the autumn. Andrew Lane from Brussels promised to help with research already done by QCEA. Watch this space!

The public lecture on Friday evening was given by Ben Pink Dandelion, Director of Postgraduate Quaker Studies at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in

Birmingham. He emphasised the fact that being a Quaker is all about living as a community, learning to love and care for one another and have a common purpose. He told us how social action became the common purpose of his home Meeting in Lancashire and that their decision to move from a beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century country meeting house into Clitheroe, the local town, in order to be nearer refugees whom they wished to help. The story of this move was a helpful illustration of how 'discernment' works, in a spirit-led community, and how the 'ministry' of the meeting puts our testimonies into practice. He was able to enlarge on some points at a question-and-answer session the following day.

Ben's public lecture can be read in full online [here](#).

The EcoQuakers film - '*Quakers - the spiritual Journey of Earthcare*' - made by Young Friend Brian O'Suilleabháin from Churchtown, may be viewed [here](#). Brian had asked Irish Friends to send him videoed answers to three questions on sustainability and he edited them down into a short film.

One of the last events was a special period of candlelit worship on Saturday evening. It was organised by Young Friends who all sat on the floor and quietly sang a spiritual song. It was well attended by many of the older Friends and was a fitting end to the hectic busy-ness of the previous days.

It was a very good Yearly Meeting, reconnecting with old friends and meeting new people; there was a large number of visitors from other Yearly Meetings many of whom made valuable contributions.

- Peter Lamb