

Present:-

Stuart Morton – (*Convenor*), Anne Smith (*Treasurer*), Martin and Liz Schweiger (*Hosts*), Pat Saunders, Erica Cadbury, Margaret Caudwell, Margaret Waterworth, Penny Robbins, Abu Siddique (Bachchu), Alick Munro (*Notetaker*),

Stuart welcomed those attending and invited brief introductions and details of activities in the past year.

Informal Conversation

Bachchu told us of the **history and geography of Bangladesh** and the people's acceptance that floods of the Brahmaputra are a mixed blessing. They rearrange the landscape, but they bring fresh alluvial soil, which are extremely beneficial for cultivation. When floods are normal, people adapt to them with floating chicken coops and raising homes above flood level.

We noted that **Norman Smith** is continuing to work on a **biography of Marjorie Sykes**, and we heard briefly of the continuing QPSW conciliation work to build peace in a particular part of the region.

We heard of financial contributions by Quaker Peace and Social Witness to relieve distress due to flooding in the Sunderbans.

Erica Cadbury gave us an account of her work with John McConnell and others to develop the charity, **Scholarships for Street Kids, (S4SK)** Reg. Charity No 1131559, www.s4ski.org.uk, E-mail: info.s4s@gmail.com

This charity provides informal education for about 200 street children in Myanmar. In the local language it is known as "Hope for Shining Stars". In the past three years funding from Myanmar Educational Council has enabled this charity to employ teachers, assistants and administrative workers. This funding is now running out and is unlikely to be renewed as government funding is now directed to the government schools that require top-up fees from parents, and do not provide preliminary education for these disadvantaged children who have difficulty adapting to the discipline of school. Funding of approx. £50K p.a. is provided from Britain for the work of the charity and at least this amount will be needed to continue the work.

Margaret Waterworth spoke of the need to consider sustainability in all humanitarian work. What, why and what next, the impact of projects and how they can be kept going – all of these need careful consideration.

Penny Robbins spoke of the need to publish information about past work in S. Asia carried out by Quaker Peace and Social Witness and its predecessor Quaker Peace and Service. She drew our attention to Sri Lanka in particular. Penny told us that publication of information on peace work in former Yugoslavia has helped local collaborators feel recognized and has encouraged them to continue their efforts. ("**To Trust a Spark – living links with Community Peacebuilders in Former Yugoslavia: a Quaker Initiative**" by Anne Bennett, published by Post-Yugoslav Peace Link c/o Friends House 2016).

GUP, Bangladesh: In response to Penny's concern for documenting Quaker's contribution in social services, Abu (Bachchu) emphasized the point by drawing attention to the work of Quaker representatives in 1954 that organized work-camps in remote parts of Bangladesh (formally East Pakistan). They were the first to do it; none knew about how a workcamp could be an effective means to bring young people of different walks of life together for common work and understanding. Additionally, Abu mentioned about the relief and rehabilitation work of the Quakers - Quaker Peace & Service (QPS), American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and Canadian

Friends Service Committee (CFC) - in 1971 and 1972 to help the people affected by the liberation war in Bangladesh. GUP (Gono Unnayan Prochesta meaning “ Peoples Development Efforts”), came out of these activities as a provider of long-term development services. The initiative was taken by the late Mohammed Aatur Rahman, who had been a lifelong friend to the Quakers; he fervently experimented to combine peace with development activities. Last year Abu visited GUP in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He met three senior former colleagues: S. A. Wahab, Executive Director; Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Director, Peace Initiatives and Training and Mozurul Islam, Project and Programme Planning. Abu recognised that GUP had passed through remarkable processes of development change. In recent times, GUP has reshaped many of its programmes, and all of these have been done to meet the contemporary needs of the people. Following the changes, mainly resulting from the proliferation of NGOs and the developed awareness of the people, GUP emphasises work on partnership, dynamic income generation and peace initiatives. At the end of his visit, Abu took an opportunity of to visit GUP's Peace Centre, which is 185 km S.W. of Dhaka city. It is a vibrant place for all kinds of workshops, seminars, conferences and symposiums, accommodating local, national and international participants. It has all the necessary facilities, albeit humble and simple. Abu spent a night in a guestroom on the top floor of the Peace Library, which is built with the contributions coming from an appeal made by Settle Quaker Meeting. See <http://www.gupbd.org/> While Abu recognises the significance of the centre, given its rich contribution in peace initiatives, he suggests it would be helpful to improve the privacy and safety of the visitors, which he says can only be done putting up a boundary wall/fence around the centre. Finally, Abu gave a brief introduction of his current work with Institute for Indian Mother and Child (IIMC) and presented the biography of the founding director, Dr. Sujit Kumar Brahmochary, which is recently completed by Abu.

Presentation: “Education in India: Experience of positive change” Margaret Waterworth

Margaret Waterworth (maggie.water@hotmail.co.uk) gave an account of her work in schools in NE London in the 1970s and 80s, teaching English to children who had arrived with their families from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and elsewhere. Inner London Education Authority sent teachers to India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to learn how they might match the curriculum in London with that in the pupils' original countries and produce texts on English in Indian languages, train teachers in Indian languages and employ teaching assistants who spoke Indian languages. Children were encouraged to assimilate English language, but retain their cultural identities. However, little attempt was made to help their parents assimilate English. Subsequently these teaching materials have been phased out and archived and the national curriculum makes much less allowance for the needs of children who speak languages other than English. The Standard Attainment Tests require much more rote learning and less creativity and personal expression. Margaret and many others regret this. The resulting difficulties faced by immigrant children may cause exclusion and alienation and this could result in a fertile breeding ground for radicalisation.

Margaret more recently has spent eight years working in Bengal with the British Council on secondment to the educational service in and around Kolkata – seeking to introduce more inclusive practice in the teaching of English as a second language and reduce the excessive rote-learning in the system, and thus equalise opportunities for Bengali children in Government and Government Aided schools.

Currently some 87% of children in and around Kolkata are enrolled in overcrowded state schools. All schools are required to absorb 25% of their pupils from marginalised and below the poverty line communities. In and around Kolkata 25 schools have opened their doors to take in 100 residential children to live in the school and attend day school alongside their peers. These children were called 'Rainbow Children' based on an inclusive educational approach introduced by Sister Cyril ,a Loreto Nun, when she was Head of an elite Loreto Missionary School In Kolkata. She is now an educational consultant for the West Bengal Primary Board. Non Government Organisations (NGOs) act as surrogate parents for many of these “rainbow” children, providing

food, clothing and housing. However absenteeism in schools is common among both teachers and pupils, and class sizes are huge. They have been known to reach 186. Teachers receive competitive salaries, but there are staff shortages and many are cynical of the system. The inspectorate teams are unable to cope with the scale of the work and sheer numbers of schools to visit thus leaving schools without support or help to improve learning outcomes

Assessments of children's performance has involved marking and grading work but there has been little attempt to advise and help pupils concentrate on areas where there is room for improvement.

One of Margaret's interests was safeguarding in the educational system, but she found there was little provision for personal mentorship of pupils nor attention to their emotional needs. This she found unfortunate because exam stress, depression and teenage suicides are common.

Absenteeism is common. Teenagers in Kolkata now have mobile phones and are developing an alienated culture with much interest in pornographic material.

Margaret used a story to illustrate how each child requires personal attention to their needs:- A duck, a gopher, a squirrel and an eagle were being taught to improve their mobility by learning to swim, run, climb and fly.

The duck did poorly at running so was required to concentrate on this. The squirrel could only fly if he climbed a tree first, so was required to work at flying from ground level, The eagle found climbing difficult but got to the top of the tree by other means when not being watched. The gopher was fine at running but spent his tuition time in a vain attempt to learn to swim. As a result the animals all left school with poor reports having wasted their time there. Teachers in India have found this a helpful illustration of the dysfunction in the system. In 2002 a Rights and Education Act was passed, which required rewriting of English textbooks. Margaret found the rewritten versions riddled with mistakes.

Margaret, has been privileged to work alongside Sister Cyril in the Government and Government Aided schools with residential pupils. Together they have pursued the idea of persuading the educational authorities to introduce teaching English by interactivity and self-expression during one lesson in six. This is particularly helpful for 14-16 year olds preparing for employment. This required authorization from the top of the hierarchy downwards, and this has therefore taken a lot of time. A government directive came that children spend more time acquiring literacy in Bengali, then Urdu and Hindi and spend less time learning English. This did not prove to be popular as there is a love of English language and literature in the population and more employment is available in English language call-centres so learning English has now become a priority for all children in Government and Gov. Aided schools.

Margaret recognized that similar problems arise in teaching English as a second language in many countries of the Global South, and there is need for better international collaboration on development of curriculum and teaching methods. She is impressed with the Scottish Social Enterprise Department's approach to international collaborative learning to improve opportunities for schools leavers. Scottish educationalist are now learning how to educate 1st generation learners in English in their own schools and countries by initiating programmes and resources to encourage Creative Writing and Citizenship by linking schools and in Scotland and Kolkata. Part of this programme will be launched in January 2017 with 10 schools in Kolkata and Glasgow linking and exchanging ideas and expertise through pupils work and teachers as enablers.

For teachers Margaret wishes them to recognize the lamp within and she prays that they be allowed to be the teachers they want to be.

Conversation with Subhash Kattel in Nepal (skype link)

Subhash Kattel is a Nepali whose father was killed in the recent civil war in Nepal. He attended a QPSW initiated nonviolence exposure in 2004 in Orissa (India) where the people's movement,

Ekta Parishad took the lead. This fostered his desire to be involved in peace work and he later attended a Quaker United Nations Organisation (QUNO) summer school in Geneva in 2007. He has subsequently worked with the Alternatives to Violence Programme (AVP) and War Resisters International (WRI) in Nepal. He has translated the WRI handbook on nonviolent campaigning into Nepali. He and other facilitators have conducted AVP workshops in Nepal since 2008, in schools, families and communities to ease tensions and inequality in family life. Subhash, who now acts as the Coordinator of AVP in Nepal, is at the involved in organising the AVP World Gathering to be held in Nepal in 2017.

In the course of our conversation, Subhash spoke of the difficulties women face in Nepali society. One woman at an AVP workshop had spoken of how she could not choose food for herself at mealtimes and could not express how she felt about herself. Another woman had been delighted at an AVP workshop as she had never found it possible to laugh at home. Domestic violence is common in Nepal, as are gang fights on the streets. In AVP workshops, Subhash and colleagues stress the value of using mind, not muscle.

When asked about the recent earthquake in Nepal, Subhash said it coincided with a period of constitutional change. Government promises of financial aid to rebuild homes have been slow to materialize, sometimes because of the complicated application process and the fact that and the poor who have never had bank accounts have found it impossible to open them. Many are still living in tents and makeshift shelters. The Indian government has promoted itself as a protector of Nepal in its current difficulties but is not providing practical help. Relations between Nepal and China are sometimes helpful, but China dislikes Nepal acting as a refuge for Tibetan refugees.

Concern about the present reality and direction of UK Government's official aid- a concern raised by Pat Saunders.

She drew our attention to the November 2015 report presented by the UK Government, in particular the summary letter at the beginning of the document. The link to the whole report can be found in the BOND document: [https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2016/10/highlights-conservative-conference?utm_source=Bond&utm_campaign=9c5854d4ee-Network News 03 08 2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9e0673822f-9c5854d4ee-247837393](https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2016/10/highlights-conservative-conference?utm_source=Bond&utm_campaign=9c5854d4ee-Network%20News%2003%2008%202016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9e0673822f-9c5854d4ee-247837393)

Our attention was drawn to the importance of the campaigning NGO in Britain "Global Justice Now" (formerly the World Development Movement) as one organisation that is a valuable source of information and action. www.globaljustice.org.uk

Subsequent to the meeting Pat has found online further information in the international development network BOND's mailing, from Concord, an EU-wide NGO. It compares the Aid activities for EU countries which is interesting, but its main value as Pat sees it, is its description and analysis of what it calls 'Inflated' spending on refugees in the donor country; tied aid; spending on students in the donor country; interest repayments on concessional loans, and future interest on cancelled debts; and debt relief. This is distinct from what it calls 'genuine' aid i.e. resources that focus explicitly on poverty eradication and agreed development effectiveness principles – in particular, ownership of such by developing countries.

The UK performs well when compared with most other EU countries in the report but it refers to the UK's new aid strategy towards the end:

"At the end of that year the UK, which had performed well in the past, launched a new aid strategy that re-focused UK aid on national interests, raising the question of how effectively its aid can meet that objective while delivering on its core purpose of poverty reduction and sustainable development. An increasing amount of UK Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) will now be spent by a variety of government departments and cross-government funds other than the development ministry (DFID), which may undermine both the quality and the nature of UK ODA and may increase its informally tied aid. To avoid this, the UK's new ODA strategy must be

implemented through appropriate procurement processes and guidance, capacity building and support.” There is some reference to a Britain’s security and defence in relation to this “aid”..

<https://concordeurope.org/2016/10/26/aidwatch-report-2016>

Thanks for the day: We departed grateful for a heartwarming and informative day, and the sense of mutual support in our endeavors. We look forward to our next meeting planned for Saturday 14th October 2017 at Westminster Meeting House.