

QUAKER SOUTH ASIA INTEREST GROUP (QSAIG)

NEWSLETTER – September 2018

<http://www.qsaig.co.uk/>

About QSAIG

QSAIG is one of about 37 Quaker Recognised Bodies¹ affiliated to the Britain Yearly Meeting. We are a network, mainly of Quakers, with personal or professional links to people or projects in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and neighbouring states. We also work with and learn from people from these countries who now reside in the UK. Our network has been active for over 18 years. We meet annually in London, Leeds or Birmingham and have a newsletter at least once a year.

About this Newsletter

Previous newsletters can be seen on the QSAIG website: <http://www.qsaig.co.uk/what-we-do/>

This newsletter is in four parts:

1. A brief overview of Quakers worldwide and in South Asia
2. News of groups with whom QSAIG has interacted in the past year
3. News of individuals – friends and partners
4. QSAIG's forthcoming events, and other items

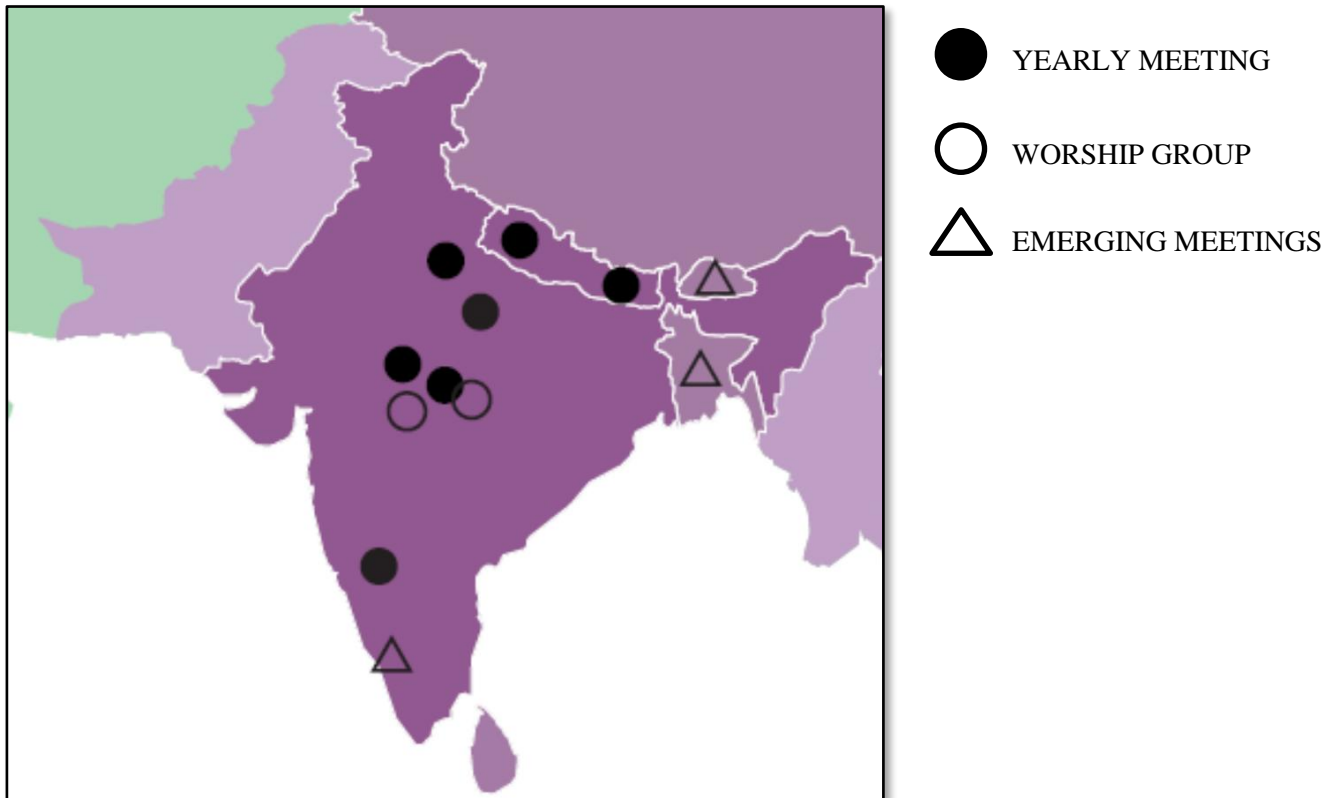
1. Quakers Worldwide & South Asia

Quakers (or Friends) are members of a Christian group of religious movements formally known as the Religious Society of Friends or Friends Church. Members of the various Quaker movements are generally united in a belief in the ability of each human being to experientially access "the light within" or "that of God in everyone".

To differing extents, the different movements that make up the Religious Society of Friends/Friends Church avoid creeds and hierarchical structures. Today, the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) estimates there are about 377,000 adult Quakers worldwide, with 49% in Africa, 36% in the Americas and 9% in Europe and the Middle East. The UK, with 23,000 adult Quakers, accounts for nearly three-quarters of the Europe and Middle East total (*Source: <http://fwccawps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/fwccworldmap2017.pdf>*)

¹ A QRB is an independent group of Friends (and others) who explore a common interest, seek affirmation or carry out witness. It wishes to be recognised as a Quaker organisation because its Quaker roots are important to its identity.

Quaker Meetings in South Asia



Source: Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)
<http://fwccawps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/fwccworldmap2017.pdf>

FWCC estimates that there are about 3,400 Quakers in India and also some in Nepal and Bangladesh (the latter are listed as members of *Evangelical Friends*, an American-led evangelical branch of the Quakers).

Quakerism came to mid-India as a result of missionaries from London Yearly Meeting. Missions were established in mid-India in 1866 by the Friends Foreign Mission Association, and today there are Yearly Meetings at:

- Mid-India (with monthly meetings at Hoshangabad, Itarsi, Kheda, Sohagpur, Seoni Malwa and Makoriya)
- Bhopal
- Bundelkhand (Madhya Pradesh) – this meeting theologically falls within the *evangelical tradition*, unlike the nearby Mid-India Meeting.

Mid-India Yearly Meeting is affiliated to FWCC. In 2002 it published a Hindi language version of Britain Yearly Meeting's "Advices and Queries", the part of British "Quaker Faith and Practice".
(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mid-India_Yearly_Meeting)

2. News of Groups and Activities

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) – Asia West Pacific Section

<http://fwccawps.org/>

The purpose of the Friends World Committee for Consultation is to encourage fellowship among all the branches of the Religious Society of Friends. FWCC's World Office is at Friends House, Euston, London. The Asia West Pacific Section is clerked by Ronald Titus of Bhopal Yearly Meeting, India, and the secretary is Ronis Chapman who lives in Australia and a member of the Canberra Regional Meeting.

Ronis was in touch with QSAIG and invited articles or short stories on any of QSAIG's activities. Her contact details are available at the FWCC-AWPS website, which also has news of their activities during the past year.

Subhash Kattel writes from Nepal:

I am a member of working group of Friends Peace Teams in Asia West Pacific (FPT AWP). We are working to finalize a date for a proposed series of Peace Trainings in Nepal later this year (2018). A group of peace workers led by Nadin Hoover (from US), myself, a friend from S. Korea and possibly a few others will join the facilitators' team. We plan to organize a National Training for Peace in Kathmandu (this is open to the public including existing AVP facilitators in Nepal). We will also be doing Peace Training for a land rights and agrarian reform group in Nepal which is the biggest nonviolent social movement in Nepal. Importantly, we plan to share our knowledge and skills for Creating Culture of Peace and develop a team of people who are willing to model transformation within their families, communities and organizations they are working in.

Merryl Titus writes from Bhopal Yearly Meeting on the 'Compassion Project':

I would like to share about the Compassion Project in India. It is an international project of caring for poor children which was started in South India in 1968. In Itarsi (Central India), it started in 2008 under the supervision of Denis Jonathan of Mid-India Yearly Meeting Itarsi. Gradually this project was spread across 2,500 centres. Each centre looked after 300-350 children providing clothes, nutrition, study and medication. These children are in very poor condition having insufficient food and residing in unhygienic slum areas.

In the middle part of India, Friends Institutions were running this project in their school in Itarsi. This school is being run by Friends School Governing Board in which the members of Mid-India YM, Bhopal YM and GCFI (General Conference of Friends in India) are serving. Unfortunately after the 2014 General Elections in India the newly elected Government stopped the funding from abroad to these projects. Now these children are deprived from basic necessities of life.

In Peace and Love,

Merryl Titus - FWCC Representative of Bhopal YM

More on Bhopal from Martin Wright, Streatham and Brixton Friends Meeting:

Martin Wright, of Streatham and Brixton Friends Meeting, London, actively supports the Bhopal Medical Appeal (<http://bhopal.org/>). The disaster occurred in 1984 and the Bhopal Medical Appeal was initiated on its 10th anniversary. Today the Appeal helps to fund a clinic and rehabilitation centre in Bhopal and also campaigns for Dow Chemicals and Du Pont to finally accept responsibility for Bhopal.

Martin spoke at QSAIG's 2017 AGM and organises activities in London. A screening of the film 'Bhopali' was recently shown and a letter published in The Guardian; also an approach was made to MP's in Parliament. He writes: *"We want to apply pressure in a restorative way, that is by emphasising the humanitarian aspects and the commercial self-interest of cleaning up the toxic site."*

Quakers and Ekta Parishad, India:

Ekta Parishad (<https://www.ektaparishad.in/>) is a people's movement dedicated to non-violent principles of action. Its activists work towards building community-based governance (*gram swaraj*), local self-reliance (*gram swawlamban*) and responsible government (*jawabdeh sarkar*). Its aim is to see India's poorest people gain control over livelihood resources, especially land, water and forest. It is a federation of approximately 11,000 community-based organizations with thousands of individual members. It is currently working in 10 States with India's most marginalized communities (tribals, dalits, nomadic communities, agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, etc.).

Stuart Morton, QSAIG Convenor, writes:

Rajagopal P.V. (President and Founding Member) visited Friends House last December 2017 and a substantial number of QPSW staff and the Recording Clerk listened to him as he spoke. We also arranged for him to meet FWCC staff. This meeting provided the springboard for the initiatives that Gerald Conyngham, I and others are seeking to take. We are working with a small group of Quakers and others close to Quakers on the JaiJagat 2020 campaign. We have held three group meetings in Birmingham in March, June and early September 2018 and will report to QSAIG at its October meeting. The working group will ask QSAIG whether it may serve as a working group under the umbrella of QSAIG.

During his visit, Raja outlined key points of action for 2018-2020, including:

- A march from Delhi to Geneva, starting in October 2019 and finishing in Geneva in September 2020. Only a few are likely to march the whole way; most people could join for sections, perhaps 25-50 people in each section. The focus will be on young people.
- Links would be made with local peace groups who may organise events along the way.
- In Geneva there would be a People's Parliament 25th Sept. to 2nd Oct. 2020 followed by a presentation to the UN of key demands.
- There would be parallel marches from other countries (so far, Spain, Belgium and Sweden). It is also hope there will be marches in Africa and Latin America.

- A key message is 'We can take care of our life; Get off my back'
- The debate in Geneva would focus round the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under four headings: (i) Fighting poverty; (ii) Exclusion and Inclusion; (iii) Violence and Terrorism; (iv) Climate Change
- In Rajagopal's view the national governments have not, and will not deliver, so how do we get the UN to facilitate the process of civil society involvement?
- Ekta can shake certain things in India but not so much beyond.
- In 2018 it is hoped that one million people will march in India.

Ideas for Quaker and QSAIG support are being considered.



March 2016: After a two-day protest organised by Ekta Parishad with more than a thousand landless rural poor at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, activists claim Prime Minister Narendra Modi has assured that the government will bring the Bill supporting homestead land rights before the Parliament.



December 2017: Ekta Parishad announced Delhi March for land reforms

3. News of Individuals – friends and partners

Pat Saunders writes: UK Parliamentary report on ‘Definition and administration of Overseas Development Assistance’ (ODA):

“I recommend that Friends read the latest report from the House of Commons International Development Committee published on 5th June 2018 and available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/547/547.pdf> .

It is a really thorough critique of the way the 0.07% of British government aid is defined, managed, spent, and administrated. It is a typical government report but scathing in its critique of some, not all, of the changes which the Government is seeking. Of particular interest is the way ODA is gradually being moved away from poverty reduction goals towards the UK’s national interest and managed, not by DFID, but by other departments in the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

I still have a lot of unanswered questions, but this report provides a much welcome starting point. I have been seeking answers to questions about the changes that are taking place for a few years now. This is the first report that has enabled me, if nothing else, to know the questions and concerns exercising parliamentarians about the changes taking place.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund is a pool of money, over £1 billion pounds per year, for tackling conflict and instability overseas, and is part of the UK Government’s Overseas Development Assistance. It is managed by the National Security Council, unlike the previous Conflict Pool which was jointly managed by Department for International Development, Ministry of Defence and Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Nasir Ahmed, Gono Unnayan Prochesta, Bangladesh, writing in March 2018:

“Stuart, I really appreciate your long and informative mail. I will read it again taking time when I am physically fit. Visiting Quakers College in Woodbrooke has also a great impact in my thinking and acts. We are still in touch with the Quakers though not on regular basis. In the first week of March 2018 Bob Anderson, the director of Quaker Service in Bangladesh immediate after the War of Liberation of 1971 visited Bangladesh and GUP.

As for my health, after chemo and radiotherapy I am physically very weak and losing my weight. I am not yet able to take proper food due to loss of taste. Besides I am also a diabetic patient, I have to take insulin twice a day. However, amidst struggling with health I am still continuing office work.

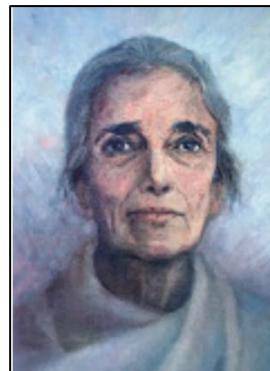
Your caring love and prayers are always a source of inspiration for me and my work.”

Norman Smith writes about his research and book on Marjorie Sykes:

"I have been undertaking research about Marjorie Sykes over the last 9 years. It's been a labour of love and I have met so many wonderful people all over the UK and India who knew her.

The manuscript is a collection of those interviews as well as many hard-to-find or out-of-print articles, translations, pamphlets etc. written by Marjorie but which give one a very good idea who she was as a person. Her thoughts on life and practice thereof are brought to light.

I plan to only print about 150 copies and distribute them to interviewees, libraries and a few persons who might have an interest. It's more of a document for others who may be doing research. It is not for sale."



[EDITOR'S Note: Norman has indicated he would be willing to share a copy by e-mail].

MARJORIE SYKES

While attending a Quaker college in the early 1970s in India, I met Marjorie Sykes at her home in the Nilgiri Hills, South India. Although I had met her only briefly I eventually became intrigued by her immense independence and her strong character.

Who was she? What did she do during the many decades she spent in India? How deep was her Quaker faith? What were her professional and personal relationships with the proponents of the burgeoning independence movement? And so, about nine years ago, I began a personal quest.

After reading Martha Dart's biography, I travelled all over the UK and India searching out and interviewing the many people who knew Marjorie who might be able to give me some personal insight into who she was.

I have now collected all my research and the many hard-to-find or out-of-print articles, translations, pamphlets, talks, etc. written by and about Marjorie. This rather large, and perhaps cumbersome, 900-page manuscript has been a labour of love and has brought light into my life.

While it is not an easy read, it might be of interest to anyone who is interested in Marjorie's thoughts on life and practice and/or in the history of the Quakers in India before, during and after Independence. If so, please contact me as I would be more than happy to share a copy with you.

In Friendship,

Norman Smith

smithnorman@gmail.com

Liz and Mike Watson: Visit to Indian Friends, January 2018

I was brought up in India as the child of Irish Presbyterian missionaries. My father was a surgeon and ran a mission hospital in Gujarat. My brother and I went to school in the Nilgiri Hills in South India until I completed my 'O' levels. My husband has heard many tales of the three-day journey we made by train between home and school so in January 2018 we visited India to retrace it. We were delighted to find that the bookings we had made on-line in the comfort of our home in Skipton materialised into our names on passenger lists in Mumbai, Coimbatore, Anand and Bhopal. It was never as easy as that 50 years ago in the era of steam trains for the couple of parents who volunteered to accompany 30 or 40 children from each of the major cities of India to school. In 2018 we travelled in air-conditioned comfort with crisp white bed-linen and enjoyed the railway catering.

After several days' nostalgia among the tea estates of Tamil Nadu we travelled north to Gujarat, where we were joined by my brother and his son. We enjoyed a kite-flying festival, a visit to the Sabarmati Gandhi ashram in Ahmadabad and an overwhelming welcome and hospitality from childhood friends.

Bhopal

At Yearly Meeting Gathering in Warwick last year, we met Merryl Titus of Bhopal meeting, so we took the opportunity to spend a few days with Friends in Madhya Pradesh at the end of our holiday. Merryl and her father, Ronald, met us at the station and looked after us for the next few days. Our interest in Bhopal had also been sparked by an article by Martin Wright in *The Friend* in December about the Union Carbide disaster and the proposal of a group of Friends in Britain to seek restorative justice with the new owners, Dow DuPont Inc.

We took an autorickshaw out to the site, which is extensive and surrounded by a wall. We found a gate which was open. There were no signs to indicate that this was the Union Carbide site or to advise the public to keep out. We therefore ventured in. However, we had only gone a short distance through the bush that has grown over the site when we were approached by two security men and told that we required permission from the Collector of Bhopal to visit. As we were only in Bhopal for 2 days and did not feel well briefed on the background, we contented ourselves with taking photos of buildings from the perimeter road.

While reading on-line about the tragedy we learned that in 2014, on the 30th anniversary of the disaster, a group of survivors opened a 'Remember Bhopal Museum' in a house about 2.5km from the site. The museum is collectively curated by a community of survivors and activists and tells their stories. It displays artefacts, oral histories, photographs, protest songs and campaign posters that have emerged in the movement for justice. Only one Friend from the meeting had heard of the museum and when we tried to visit it, the taxi drivers seemed unaware of it too. We took an autorickshaw to the housing colony where it is sited but, despite asking numerous local residents, we did not manage to find it.

Quaker activities in Hoshangabad and Itarsi

One day a Friend drove us to Hoshangabad, a 2-3 hour drive on narrow roads crowded with heavily loaded lorries. In the 1870s the Friends Foreign Mission Association sent Quaker Missionaries to Hoshangabad. A school and an orphanage developed. In 1889 a visiting Quaker businessman, Frederick Sessions found the funds to start an industrial training centre at Rasulia, on the edge of

Hoshangabad and employed a very able local Hindu foreman. The unit's first job was to repair the town's fire engines, and the rapid growth of the railways and government buildings created a large demand for furniture and fittings which the unit could supply. The industrial training centre eventually closed but the centre at Rasulia was revived in the Gandhian era of the mid 1930s as a rural settlement where Indian and English workers could come together on a basis of equality to study and give practical service in the community through Gandhian programmes of various kinds, including a major agricultural development project on the 47 acre site. Now the place looks rather neglected. With the growth of the city of Hoshangabad, the development of the site has been halted by legal wrangling over land ownership. The centre is used from time to time for gatherings of Friends, particularly young Friends. Last year young Friends learned how to make concrete water filters which they hoped to distribute to the villages of the area. However, there has been no one to carry the project forward after the young people dispersed.

Quaker Schools

The Friend we travelled with was on his way to a General Board Meeting of the Quaker schools in Itarsi and Sohagpur. In the 1890s a severe famine affected this part of India and the Quaker missionaries were led to care for large numbers of orphaned children. The families of these orphans still form the core of the local Quaker churches today. Education in India has long been seen as the path to wealth and personal security. Certificates of educational attainment were required for entry to salaried or government employment. This pressure was particularly felt by the large numbers of young people who grew up in the Quaker orphanages so the Quaker schools accepted the pattern of government-regulated teaching. Originally an orphanage, the Sohagpur Girls School is a boarding school. However, for the last 15 years the government has stopped contributing to the salaries of new teachers in the schools and the pension scheme for existing, supported teachers has been stopped. The schools were founded to serve the children of poor families and do not charge the level of fees that many private schools do. The Quaker schools are also Hindi-medium and nowadays families value an English-medium education. It has been difficult to recruit new teachers or students and the standards of education have fallen. The hostel at Sohagpur has very few boarders at present, making it uneconomic to run.

The proposal agreed at the meeting that day was that application should be made to run a Diploma in Education on the Sohagpur site, charging commercial fees. Should the application be successful, it is hoped that this will raise funds and also be a source for recruiting teachers in future.

Bhopal's New Meeting House

Friends in Bhopal raised funds to rebuild their 'church' 4 or 5 years ago. Today the Friends in Bhopal Meeting are nearly all from 2nd and 3rd generation Quaker families. Christians in India feel vulnerable and the Quakers are anxious to stress their evangelical credentials in order to be accepted into the fellowship of Christian churches in the area. In the current political climate it is difficult for them to work with people of other faiths in the community.

The programmed meeting for worship had the traditional structure of hymns, prayers, readings and a sermon. The responsibility for these roles was shared across the meeting, with 7 or 8 of the eleven Friends who were present contributing that day. It appeared that every person present was willing to take their turn to prepare a sermon, responsibilities being allocated each week. The worship was in Hindi but we were able to understand the preacher's frequent 'Hallelujah's and 'Praise the Lord's.

The new building is light and spacious and there are plans to expand to a second story in due course. We were uplifted by the welcome and hospitality we received. After the meeting for worship everyone accompanied us to a viewpoint on the hill overlooking the city.

British Government response to consultation on Caste in Great Britain and Equality Law

Stephanie Ramamurthy has contacted QSAIG regarding the British Government's consultation on caste in Britain. The QSAIG convener circulated this consultation to QSAIG members for their interest, and in August 2018 Stephanie replied with the Government's response to the consultation (see below):

The Government published on 23 July 2018 its response to the public consultation on Caste in Great Britain and equality law. As the result of a 2013 amendment to section 9 (5) (a) of the Equality Act 2010, a duty exists to introduce specific legal protection against discrimination because of caste, by making caste an aspect of race for the purposes of the Act. However, the subsequent judgment of an Employment Appeal Tribunal [EAT] in the *Tirkey v Chandhok* case in 2014 established that many of the facts relevant in considering caste in many of its forms might be equally capable of being considered as part of a person's ethnic origins, which is already part of the existing race provisions within the Act.

The consultation invited views on whether suitable legal protection against caste discrimination is better ensured by exercising the duty or by relying on emerging case-law under the Act as developed by courts and tribunals. Following the consultation, which received over 16,000 responses, the Government's response concludes "Having given careful and detailed consideration to the findings of the consultation, Government believes that the best way to provide the necessary protection against unlawful discrimination because of caste is by relying on emerging case-law as developed by courts and tribunals. In particular, we feel this is the more proportionate approach given the extremely low numbers of cases involved and the clearly controversial nature of introducing 'caste', as a self-standing element, into British domestic law". "The duty that currently appears in section 9 (5) (a) of the Equality Act 2010 requires Government to take action to include caste as an aspect of race for the purposes of the Act. The decision to rely on emerging case-law renders that duty redundant and we will identify the most suitable legislative vehicle that can be used to repeal it at an early opportunity."

The full response is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/caste-ingreat-britain-and-equality-law-a-public-consultation>

4. QSAIG – forthcoming events, and other items

Forthcoming Events

13th Oct. 2018 **QSAIG's Annual Meeting, Birmingham**

*Selly Oak Quaker Meeting House, 930 Bristol Road, Selly Oak,
Birmingham B29 6NB*

Arrivals from 10.00am: meeting 10.30 – 16.00

Bring and share lunch.

PROGRAMME:

- *Post-war Sri Lanka: challenges to reconciliation – Elizabeth Harris*
- *Lack of ethnic diversity within the Quaker community in Britain – conversation facilitated by Anne Smith*
- *Update on Ekta Parishad's initiatives*
- *Update on Bhopal Restorative Justice initiative – Alick Munro*
- *Quaker World Relations Committee and the role of QSAIG – Alick Munro*
- *QSAIG's AGM*

Further details can be seen on the website, <http://www.qsaig.co.uk/>

Get in Touch

We are always interested to hear news of friends and groups in South Asia and Europe. If you have anything you would like to share, please do get in touch with:

- The QSAIG co-convenor, Stuart Morton, at stuartm46@gmail.com
- The QSAIG membership secretary & treasurer, Anne Smith, at m_anne_smith@yahoo.co.uk
- The QSAIG newsletter editor, Rob Gallagher, at gallagher.rob@hotmail.co.uk
- The QSAIG website manager, Martin Schweiger, at germ.buster@phoncoop.coop

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