

THE YOUNG QUAKER

For Young Friends Everywhere

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EXPOSING BP AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

CHRIS WALKER reports to us on the recent action against the British Museum's corporate sponsorship by BP.

In September, on the morning of the People's Climate March, I was one of eighty Quakers, Buddhists and performers to enter the British Museum to make an intervention. Members of the 'BP or Not BP' activist performance group began a steady chant in the building's grand atrium, declaring that the Museum's sponsor, BP, was guilty of 'gross negligence'.

It was the ruling given by US judge Carl Barbier over the oil company's disregard for environmental and safety standards that resulted in the Gulf of Mexico disaster in 2010. Whilst the judge's damning verdict was repeated, others dressed as animals and an oil worker performed

the suffering caused by the company's actions. We then held eleven minutes of contemplative Buddhist and Quaker silence; a minute for each of the oil workers who lost their lives during the disaster.

Oil giant BP sponsors the British Museum along with three other of London's most treasured cultural institutions; the Tate Britain, Tate Modern and the National Portrait Gallery. It's a common strategy for corporations to help legitimise their image by donating money to public institutions and events. Companies like BP are keen to have their brands associated with culture, education and sport to maintain what has been called their 'social licence to operate'. The Gulf of Mexico is the not the only stain on BP's brand.

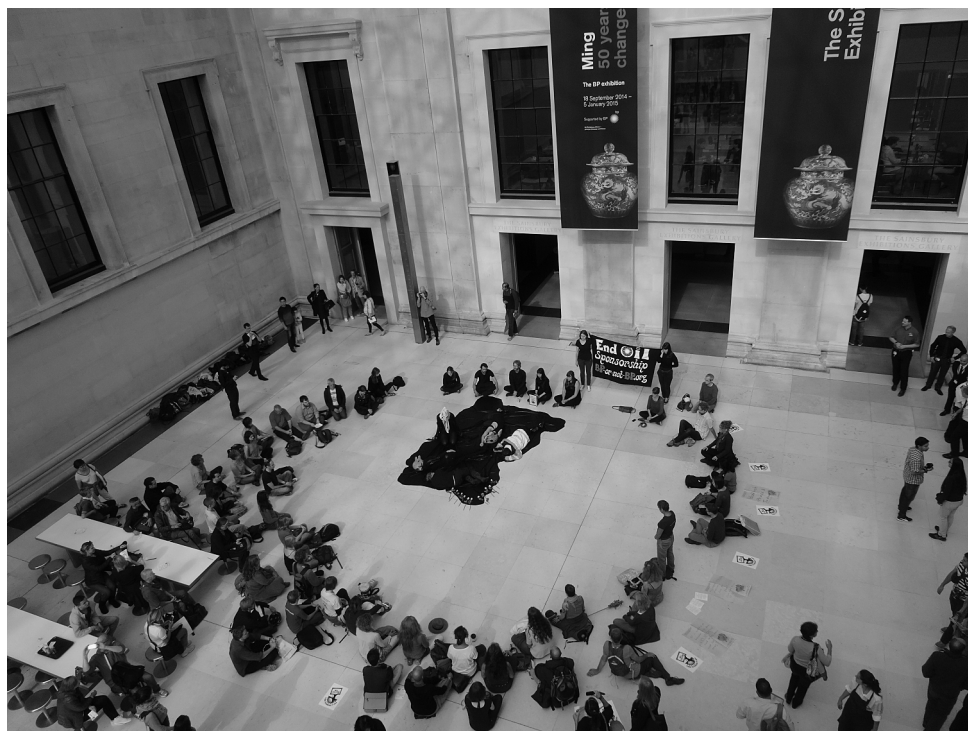
The corporation makes a profit of

around £13bn a year by expanding oil production, keeping our economy hooked on fossil fuels and lobbying governments hard to undermine progressive climate and environmental policies. It is a leading investor in highly destructive extraction techniques like the Canadian tar sands, and continues to buy up oil reserves despite dire warnings of a planet in peril.

September's intervention follows a series of actions at the British Museum by BP or Not BP, the Dharma Action Network for Climate Engagement (DANCE), and a group of Friends living and working locally. This included four silent, worshipful actions by Quakers. We felt moved to bear witness to the suffering caused by BP and create a presence in the museum that disrupted BP's efforts to disguise itself as a legitimate part of our daily lives and culture.

During our early actions, security guards surrounded us nervously and demanded that we leave. They've since realised there is little they can do to stop us. Tourists have stopped to ponder our silent presence (some have even joined us) and to read signs and leaflets we have left around us. One is a quote from Desmond Tutu "People of conscience need to break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change."

For me, our actions have been a powerful way to expose this injustice and hold faith that our society, culture and economy can break free from the grip of BP and other corporations driving destruction.



Our planet is seriously ill and we can feel the pain. We have been reminded of the many ways in which the future health of the earth is under threat as a result of our selfishness, ignorance and greed. Our earth needs attention, respect, love, care and prayer

Quaker Faith & Practice, 25.02

YFGM FREE MENTAL HEALTH WEEKEND

TOBY FREEMAN reports on an exciting weekend for YFGMers organised by Beckyl Riddell, Sarah Castle and Bea Shelley, following their experiences of being involved and interested in the area of Mental Health, and wanting YFGM to explore this subject.

From 29th to 31st August I attended a YFGM Free weekend relating to Mental Health. This weekend was held at Becky Riddell's parents' house in the countryside in Buckinghamshire; that was a good location to host the event, the sitting room made it feel like a proper meeting house environment.

The weekend itself and the activities were excellent. The things we did help me understand more about how I think and focus on the process of my thoughts. The Introduction to Mindfulness session gave an enhanced awareness of how our thoughts can develop visually and through sound; this allowed me to reflect on the method of my own thinking process. This session in general has helped increase my self-consciousness.

I attended a journal session that was quite similar to "Introduction to Mindfulness"; this was a session where I took inspiration of words that described personalities. When I got ideas from those words they let



me focus on my own personal beliefs. To me these personal beliefs I thought of are important to human nature; as I thought this at the time it gave me the instinct to quote them in one of the journals. For example I wrote that it is good to be positive about things.

All of the sessions during the weekend were useful and interesting. By attending them I was able to visualise a clear picture of how our mind and body functions together. As well as the sessions it was also good to be staying in a relaxed area in the coun-

tryside where we got to go out for a walk and enjoy the scene.

Overall, attending this event helped me understand more about mental health. I recognised that in my everyday life I am true to my own character, and it opened my consciousness of this characteristic I have.

Going on my instinct with some things allowed me to determine my own character during this weekend. Concentrating on thinking approaches and realising new things about them enabled me to be more self aware.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING CORNER

I recently attended the YFGM Free weekend on Mental Health, and one thing that came up was how finding Quakers and a spiritual basis to life has helped many of us find new solutions to mental health issues, and given us much greater feelings of personal well-being and happiness.

My turning point was finding Twelve Step recovery groups for my mental health issues. These groups are based on spiritual principles, and gave me a totally different way of seeing my issues and my life.

It also led me to Quakerism and to YFGM- so I'm grateful for the issues I've had, as without them I'd have never met all the lovely peeps at YFGM and in the world of Quakerism!

JULIAN WOOD



EMEYF SPRING GATHERING 2015, GEORGIA

By ANDREW LANE

Why Georgia? I had gone out for the afternoon at the 2014 Spring Gathering of EMEYF (European and Middle East Young Friends, see www.emeyf.org) and wasn't in the hostel when Friends met to determine where the 2015 Europe and Middle East Young Friends Spring Gathering would be held. I returned to find the group reeling from a Business Meeting that had agreed to hold the next Spring Gathering in Georgia. I heard stories of a discernment process that seemed to have surprised everyone.

Part of the reason for the decision was that several Georgian Friends have been hoping to come to Spring Gathering for several years, but each year they have been denied a visa to enter the country where the gathering was taking place.

Georgia is a beautiful country with the Caucasus mountains to the north and the Black Sea to the west. It experienced violent conflict in 1992-3 and 2008, but had its first peaceful transition of power following the elections in 2012.

The Georgian language uses a unique script, where every letter looks a bit like the number 3. For example, water is pronounced ts'q'ali and would be written წყალი



Map: CIA World Factbook

Along with its close cousins, Svan, Mingrelian, and Laz, it is one of the Kartvelian languages, which are not known to be related to any other languages in the world.

A handful of Friends in Georgia hold un-programmed Meeting for Worship in the capital Tbilisi. We may think Young Friends can be isolated in Britain, but Friends in Tbilisi would probably have to travel more than 700 miles south west to Lebanon to find their next nearest Quaker Meeting.

The Spring Gathering is an opportunity to support, share with, and learn from our Friends in Georgia.

It's also a chance to deepen our spirituality with Friends from around

Europe through discussion and worship. I had fun last year and recommend April's Spring Gathering in Georgia to anyone up for a bit of a Quaker adventure.

For more information on EMEYF's Spring Gathering, which will be held in April 2015, visit www.emeyf.org. A number of UK-based Young Friends are attending, so you needn't go alone.

EMEYF is a community of Young Friends aged 18-30 from across Europe and the Middle East. It can be thought of as being something like YFGM covering a much bigger area. EMEYF's main event each year is the Spring Gathering, which is held in a different location each year.

In the last few years, EMEYF has visited Germany, Switzerland, Yorkshire, and the Republic of Macedonia. See TYQ #5 for a write-up of Spring Gathering 2014 in Macedonia.

The 2015 Spring Gathering will be taking place from the 4th-11th April somewhere in Georgia – exactly where is still to be confirmed!



Georgian Friends on an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) exercise.
Photo: Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)

What would you like to see in The Young Quaker?

Let us know:
theyoungquaker@gmail.com

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173-177 Euston Road
London NW1 2BJ

A YFGM NEWCOMER'S STORY

By ANTHONY RIDGE-NEWMAN

Can someone be raised a lifelong Anglican, but feel a lifelong Quaker? I somewhat feel that that might apply to me. Do I believe in "God"? Yes. Do I believe in Jesus as the Son of God? Yes. But, do I feel that in order for people to worship next to me in a faith community that they have to believe exactly what I believe?

No. Generally, I have been open to exploring a range of Christian traditions throughout my life. However, being a free thinker, I have seldom felt comfortable with prescribing to a particular strand of Christianity in its entirety. Some of my extended family have had an association with Cadbury's. Consequently, from a young age I was given a general understanding of Quakerism from a more industrial perspective.

At the time, I did not know enough about myself or Quaker faith and practice to come to the realisation that I have had a strong lifelong affinity for and synergy with Quaker

values. I did not know that the values I have long held dear, sometimes discreetly, were such a bedrock of Quakerism.

About 18 months ago, while attending an Anglican church, I felt drawn to explore Quakerism in the more spiritual context, so I attended a number of meeting houses and started doing some reading. Later, I found a young Quaker group and the Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM).

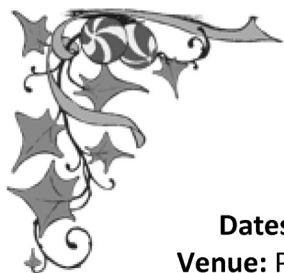
At my first YFGM gathering at Woodbrooke, I was surprised to be nominated and appointed as an Overseer. I thought I would be too new and too old (being in my thirties). Being within a community of diversity works for me because the uniqueness of the individual is accepted and embraced. The individual is permitted to be where they are at in their own journey, while feeling part of an encouraging community.

Generally, I do not feel that labels or formal memberships are truthful or helpful. Therefore, I would find it



awkward to refer to myself in absolute terms as either a Quaker or an Anglican (or a Quangelican for that matter). I am influenced by both traditions and indeed many other approaches to life. Put simply, I feel blessed to be an individual who is part of a caring community of friends.

Read more of Anthony's fascinating path here: www.ridgenewman.blogspot.co.uk/p/about.html



The Big Sing!



Dates: 12th – 14th December

Ages: 14+ (no upper limit!)

Venue: Peterborough Meeting House, 21 Thorpe Road, Peterborough, PE3 6AB

Deck the halls with more than just holly for this year's festive themed Big Sing! Bring your voices, your instruments and your favourite songs to Peterborough for a weekend of good food, festive spirit, fun, Friends and of course, singing!

The Big Sing is a residential weekend of singing workshops and music making; all levels of singing experience are welcome, from beginners to professionals – being able to read music is helpful but not necessary.

All meals and resources are provided for the weekend, and you are welcome to bring as many instruments, songs or ideas as you want. Accommodation is on the Meeting House floor, so you'll need to bring sleeping bags, mats and pillows – anything you need to stay warm and comfortable. You are welcome to arrange alternative accommodation if preferred.

For more information contact the Leavers office on **0121 414 0099** or email Charlie@leavers.org

New to The Leavers? The Big Sing is the perfect project to find out who we are, and what we do. Also, there's no upper age limit for the weekend, but if you're aged 14-25 you can attend for a reduced rate!

LETTER TO YOUNG FRIENDS FROM PALESTINE

CHRIS VENABLES is currently serving as an ecumenical accompanier with EAPPI in Hebron, Palestine. You can read his letters home by visiting www.burungaar.wordpress.com and you find out more about EAPPI by visiting their website – www.eappi.org. Chris welcomes comments and questions – chrisjvenables@gmail.com

Fuck you, fuck you,” the soldier shouted moments after I’d seen him shoot two smoke grenades at a group of children, some of whom had just thrown a few small stones towards him at checkpoint 209. This checkpoint is just one of the many military posts that children have to walk through every day to get to school across the West Bank, Palestine.

Tear gas and sound grenades are a regular occurrence at these checkpoints – and last week, during Rosh Hashanah, my colleagues and I also witnessed live ammunition being used. The EAPPI team in Hebron stands near three of these checkpoints every day, twice a day – as children make their way to and from school. In the madness of it all, I have often found myself thinking: how did I end up here? Well, I’m a Quaker.

But, I’m not a fully-paid-up-type-of-Quaker. And, I’ll be honest, I do sometimes question the whole venture: what does being a Quaker really mean anyway? That is probably a question for another article in *The Young Quaker* or, even better, a pint after a YFGM – which I’ve still not been to but would very much like to.

I found Quakers through my involvement in the peace movement when I was a student in York. My university (like most universities) had large investments in the arms trade, and, along with a group of concerned students, we spent too much of our time (i.e. to the detriment of our studies) persuading the university management that it should divest, and also stop accepting research funding, from the likes of BAE Systems.

It was through this work that I heard the word ‘Quaker’. After a ‘spiritual

crisis’ (a.k.a. breakdown), some ‘time out from my studies’, (a.k.a. a good counsellor), and some prolonged Googling, I found myself sitting, every other week or so, at Friargate meeting in York.

Three years, many hundred MfWs, and several thousand cups of tea later, here I am, writing an article in *The Young Quaker*. A belief in the inefficacy of violence, and the injustice that both causes it and is caused by it, is a fundamental part of the story of how I became involved with the Quakers. (I particularly like this last way of describing my connection to Quakerism: it makes it sound like a messy, complicated and confusing relationship – which it is.)

I should add that the peace testimony is no longer the core of my Quakerism, I found in Meeting for Worship something deeper – but, still, the root of my connection remains an interest, both personal and academic, in the causes of violence and the way to peace.

Working for an organisation (EAPPI) which has an explicit message of nonviolence is one way to really challenge and explore these beliefs. I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to say – in the ilk of that famous US politician – that any of my truths are self-evident. If living and working under military occupation teaches

you one thing it’s that nothing is obvious, most things make no sense, and your brain might explode if you try too hard to make them.

I find the Quaker peace testimony is also a bit like this. On the one hand, violence seems to solve the problem – ask the soldiers at checkpoint 209 mentioned earlier: they fired the tear gas, shot the rubber bullets and the children stopped throwing stones. There’s no denying it – albeit that we might have other things to say about firing weapons at children. But, on the other hand, we know that violence of this sort can further entrench hatred and anger, move communities further apart, destroy the chances of peace, and ultimately, create and justify more violence.

As I understand it, the idea that violence breeds violence is core to the Quaker peace testimony. The soldiers have been firing tear gas and rubber bullets for many years now, and nothing has changed – violence has solved nothing. In fact, the situation in Hebron continues to deteriorate. For me, the peace testimony, with all its paradoxes, truisms and truths, continues to be a challenge and one I suspect I will struggle with for a very long time.

The views in this article do not reflect the views of EAPPI, the World Council of Churches or Quakers in Britain.



Chris Venables is serving as an EAPPI in Hebron, Palestine



Quakers
at the
People's
Climate
March,
London
21st
September

Photo:
Louisa
Wright

'WHAT CAN I DO?' PEACE HUB PROVIDES AN ANSWER

By PETE DOUBTFIRE

That's terrible, but what can I do?' It's a question that many of us have asked ourselves at some point, and struggled to find an answer in the face of what seems like a violent and unjust world.

Having felt like this throughout my teens, one day a flyer fell into my lap from a human rights organisation. It sparked something in my mind which made me realise I needed to just get up and do something.

The first step was to take small actions alongside likeminded people, which cumulatively could make a difference. Finding Quakerism, with its emphasis on trusting our leadings and putting faith into action, has been a huge support in persevering on this path.

There's a whole range of people out there caught in the 'what can I do?' trap. That's where Peace Hub – an exciting new project from Central England Quakers – comes in.

From Autumn 2014, Peace Hub will use a shop space in central Birmingham as a centre to inform and stimulate dialogue, encourage people to affirm the humanity of



others, and provide opportunities to take action. We'll be open to everyone who is in sympathy with our call to take action for a just and peaceful world: Quakers, the wider peace movement and the general public alike.

Our opening programme of peace and justice themes includes UK arms exports, Fairtrade and conscientious objection. To overcome the 'what can I do?' blues we'll have creative, simple and fun actions – starting with a giant arms export licence that members of the public can help 'embargo'.

So if you're in Birmingham between 11.00 and 14.30, why not pop in, have a chat and take part! We're at 41 Bull Street, B4 6AF, or join in online: visit www.peace-hub.org.uk to find out about our latest activities.

CONTRADICTIONS AT FRIENDS HOUSE

By LESLIE BLACK

Once again, the use of zero-hour contracts in Friends House London must be brought to the attention of Quakers outside of the building.

After the quiet summer period, a number of zero hours staff returned to Friends House expecting to work, but were told that due to the "necessities of building works" and "the needs of the business" there was no work available. However, shortly after and with only week's notice, two roles were advertised that covered work shared between 4 zero hours catering staff. Zero-hour staff were advised to apply – essentially to compete with each other – for their own jobs.

Advertising these roles has breached an informal agreement with the union to hold back on any rearrangement of roles and work within catering until the organisation had an official zero-hours policy. Instead it aims to resolve the ethical problem of zero-hours contracts by simply getting rid of zero-hours staff who, it should also be noted, are often outspoken about how the organisation treats staff.

The union had little power to stop this, so in response a group of staff came together to write and distribute an open letter that highlighted this problem in the context of ongoing unease with the culture and direction of the organisation. Management's response has been simply to put the application date for the new roles back a week and fails to address the ethical points raised.

Management's behaviour demonstrates contradictions, claiming there is "no work" at a time when many Hospitality staff are over-worked and the business is expanding. The restaurant's capacity has been increased, and a contractor has been hired to provide service in the Large Meeting House. They have also demonstrated that there is one rule for the outside world – where Quakers will listen to concerns from lived experience raised through informal channels – and 'Quaker business', where only the proper channels matter, and only behaviour that breaches formal agreements and the law is considered unethical.

YEARLY MEETING GATHERING

This page would normally include a write-up of the exciting things that we did at the last YFGM. But since then, something even bigger happened – Yearly Meeting Gathering, or YMG.

Nearly 2,000 Quakers spent the week of the 2nd-9th of August loitering within tents, as a field on the University of Bath campus was transformed into a tented village, full of worship, discussion, and plenty of socialising. Over the course of the event, Britain Yearly Meeting in session considered thorny issues such as whether or not to start revising our book of discipline, Quaker Faith & Practice, and how to respond to the ever-increasing number of Quakers not in membership of the Society.

Although the theme of the event was 'Commitment and Belonging', there was a second, informal theme running through the week; the shadow of war. The 4th August marked the centenary of the Britain's entry into the First World War, which was marked with an all-age commemoration in the afternoon, and an epilogue arranged by YFGM in the evening. The epilogue was themed around a comment attributed to Sir Edward Grey on the eve of war; "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time."

Another highlight was the George Gorman Lecture, which is customarily given by a young Friend. This year, Jessica Metherringham spoke on the topic of "Equality: is it what we think it is?", raising questions and prompting her audience to challenge their own preconceptions.

The next Britain Yearly Meeting will be in London from 1st-4th May 2015, and the next YMG will be at the University of Warwick in 2017.

Don't miss out! The next YFGM will be:
20th - 22nd February 2015 at Norwich Meeting House
www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk - 020 7663 1050 - yfgm@quaker.org.uk



QUNO

Quaker United Nations Office

Programme Assistant in Peace and Disarmament

LOCATION: QUNO Geneva, Switzerland
 SALARY: Swiss Francs 1,460 per month plus housing benefits
 CONTRACT: 1 Year Fixed Term Contract (February 2015 - January 2016)
 HOURS: Full time, 40 hours pw

An opportunity for a person with an interest in international affairs to experience work on peace and development issues at the international level. Working primarily as an assistant to QUNO's Representative on Peace and Disarmament, the chosen candidate will learn about, and contribute to, Quaker work at the UN in a small, friendly team.

While much of the work will build on the candidate's professional skills, willingness to assist with general office, catering and domestic duties is essential. Open to Friends or those in close sympathy with the Religious Society of Friends.

For more information download the complete job description and application form at:

www.quno.org



Photo: James Surry

WHAT IS *THE YOUNG QUAKER*?

The *Young Quaker* is a magazine for young Friends everywhere, produced in print and online. Published by YFGM, TYQ comes out three times a year, to coincide with YFGM weekends – meaning that you can expect a new issue in February, May, and October.

The aim of TYQ is to share news, opinion, and pretty much anything that might be of interest to young Quakers.

All of our articles are either written by young Friends, about things that young Friends have been doing, or simply about things that young Friends might find interesting. Most of our articles tick two or three of those boxes, too.

We're always looking for new material. If you've got an idea for an article you'd like to see in *The Young Quaker*, get in touch with us at the email address below. If you're able to write it, even better!

Although our focus is on the UK, we also welcome articles from Quakers in other countries, and we also welcome submissions from people under 18; you might not be able to come to YFGM yet, but we'd love to hear from you.

WHAT IS YFGM?

Young Friends General Meeting, abbreviated as YFGM, is the national community for young adult Quakers in Britain.

Our main events are the three General Meetings which take place at Quaker meeting houses around the country in February, May, and October each year.

These weekends are open to anyone aged between 18 and 30ish who is a Quaker or interested in Quakerism, from the UK or farther afield, and are a chance to meet like-minded people and find out more about what Young Adult Friends do.

YFGM is an autonomous organisation, entirely run by the young people who take part in it, using Quaker principles and methods. We're also an active part of the wider Quaker community in Britain, providing representatives to bodies such as Meeting for Sufferings, Quaker Life, and the NFPB.

If you'd like to get involved in YFGM, to come along to a YFGM event, or simply find out more, then visit the YFGM website at yfgm.quaker.org.uk or email yfgm@quaker.org.uk. You can also find the YFGM group on Facebook.

WHAT ARE QUAKERS?

Quakers, officially known as the Religious Society of Friends, are a religious group which started in the north of England in the seventeenth century. Originally a Christian sect, modern Quakers include people from a multitude of religious and philosophical positions.

One of the key ideas in Quakerism is that truth isn't necessarily found in old scriptures, but can be revealed to anybody who listens for it. Quaker worship is mostly silent, with people speaking when they feel called to do so by the 'Inner Light', sometimes called 'that of God within everyone'.

Quakers are concerned with making the world a better place through testimony. Central to Quakerism are the Testimonies of Peace, Equality, Truth (or Integrity) and Simplicity. Others, such as a Testimony to the Environment, are also spoken of in some contexts.

A commitment to these principles has put Quakers at the forefront of political and social issues; for example, Quakers were among the leading groups who campaigned for the abolition of slavery, and in more recent years Quakers advocated strongly for the legalisation of same-sex marriage.



Scan this QR code with your phone to experience the digital edition of TYQ

The Co-Editors would like to thank all those who have contributed to this edition of *The Young Quaker*. It would be impossible to produce the magazine without the articles and photographs that you send in.

Please get in touch if you would like to contribute to the next issue, due out in time for the next YFGM in February 2015. We would welcome any submissions for this edition no later than the 30th January 2015.

Co-Editors for this Issue:
JULIAN WOOD and TIM SEARLE-BARNES

The Young Quaker can be found online at
www.theyoungquaker.org.uk

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MEET THE YFGMERS:
HANNAH

"Hi I'm Hannah. I work with conscientious objectors around the world and I attend YFGM."