

### A KIND OF FLIT

So the Quakers are looking a bit dusty, numbers are dropping while the average age goes up, and something needs to be done. First, what's wrong with us? Well, not a lot. We're a pretty good bunch of people really. Well respected but often little understood. We've got a reputation for being honest, moderate people, helpful and generous to those in need and, hopefully, a few more good things too. But we need to go forward, a bit of a makeover here and there, and drop off some outdated habits, just as our predecessors realised that bonnets, grey clothes and Thee and Thou had had their day, and we need to increase our numbers.

Think of it like moving house, or a flit as it's known in the North. Why should you want to move? What's wrong with the present house? It's about the right size, but it needs more space for visitors and especially more room for children. However, there's far too much work in it, the windows aren't big enough and it's full of clobber. So first let's get rid of some of the clobber. All those lengthy business meetings need to be trimmed, made more attractive and reduced in number. When a local meeting asks for volunteers to go to an Area Meeting, do we all jump up and shout 'Please teacher can I go?' No, we silently look around and hope one of those stalwarts will volunteer. Frequently it's the same people each time.

So Area Meeting is first on the list for a makeover. Can it be combined with something else such as a concert, a talk, a barbecue or even a shop window treasure hunt? And what's laid on for the children/older children? If there's nothing much arranged except a bit of colouring and a story, then think again. Perhaps a picnic or a trip to the swimming pool or a game of football. With good advertising beforehand the event will bring in more members with families.

Now what about Quaker-speak; it sounds so odd and outdated, surely it's time to use more common terminology (Meeting for Sufferings – oh deary, deary me). Though our business procedures are excellent it must be very putting off for newcomers to read such items in an AM report as:-

'We have heard the minute of record of life of John England read at the start of our meeting for worship. A copy of this minute of record is attached to these minutes.'

Why not:-

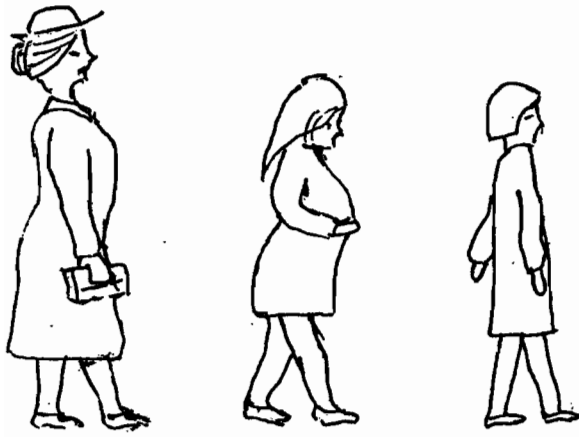
'A record of John England's life was read at our meeting for worship. A copy is attached.'

And 'We thank our Friends for their service' could be:-

'Mary and Jane were thanked for their services.'



Next on the list is the large number of appointments. Can we trim that down or lessen the load? We're becoming top heavy, all chiefs and not enough Indians.



There's one here the very name of which is scary and makes one think of fallen young women being chaperoned to church,

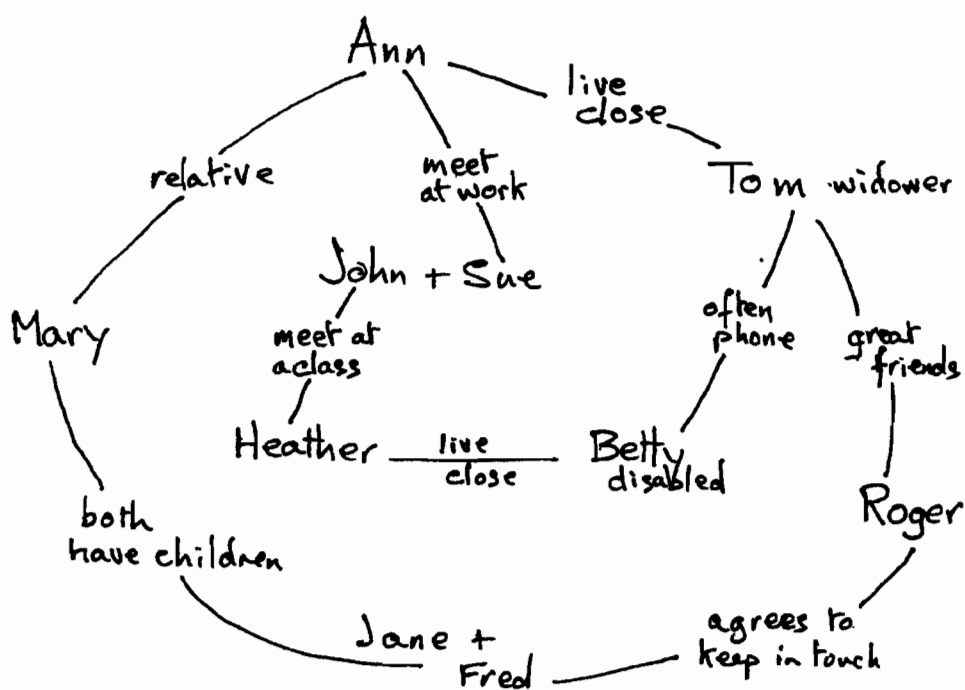
or a rather fierce school inspector.



'Overseers' Oh, goodness me here's something really outdated. Going back to our house move, it's rather like hanging on to that piece of furniture just because it belonged to Grandpa; it's been polished up and mended a bit but never moved out.

So Overseers must go.

A friendly link-up is much more suitable and preferable. A single meeting at your local meeting (L.M.) or even just telephone calls allows each Friend or attender to state their preferred link, it may be by location or just friendly compatability. By this means, a chart of links will emerge, some in twos, some in threes, maybe in a circle. It could look like this:



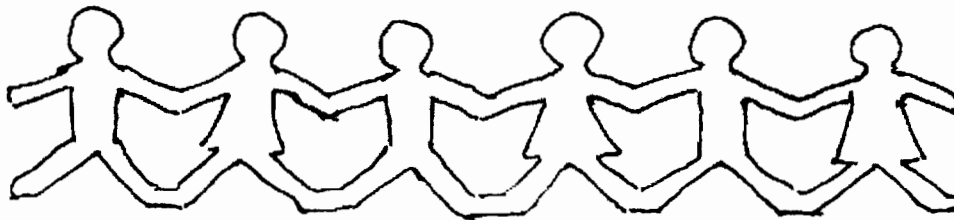
It's a simple fact that a family without children will soon die out. So in our new house let's get the children's room in order.

Every meeting should advertise 'Children welcome'.

**QUAKER MEETING  
CHILDREN WELCOME**

'Oh but' I can hear the wails. 'There are only a few of us, we're all elderly, we rent a room' and so on and so on. Well, the first thing is for every Friend, well almost every Friend, to get a CRB certificate (Criminal Records Bureau). Tiresome, yes, but there it is, some things have to be conformed to. Then if children arrive there will be Friends able to care for them. Nor will anyone have to mind someone else's children on their own because the Government insists there must be two people.

So what can you do with the children? Even if you are elderly, don't think the task is not for you; there is so much that older folk can pass on to the next generation. Little skills like hammering a nail, cutting out biscuits, making a potato into a funny animal, or just telling them what sort of clothes Grandpa wore are all means of guiding children in to sharing, observing and putting others first. As many small meetings will need help in getting a children's group organised, there should be a pool of child experts who could be drawn on to visit a meeting for a day session and give practical advice to members. We must make ourselves more child-friendly.



What about green issues?

The earth we live on is now in a sorry state and there is a need for every house to become greener. Are we really making a big enough effort here? Are Quakers leaders in the field? Apart from a few individuals, and in spite of the excellent articles that are written and the endless warnings in the media, the answer is 'No'. So there is scope here to be much, much more active. Our Local Meetings and individual members need help and encouragement both in their meeting houses and personal lifestyles. How about weekly tips in the Friend and greening competitions between local meetings. Bring in the children here, they are usually full of ideas.

But helping the environment goes beyond our personal lives. Quakers could and should be doing a great deal more to pressure our government and local authorities for more public transport, cycle ways, less air travel, fewer bright lights in the cities and a more economic use of fuel everywhere. We are missing a big opportunity here to make ourselves better known in the world.

It is clear that the Society of Friends will find many ways to use new technologies in the future. The virtual world is developing so fast that it is impossible to predict just how and where it will go. Already virtual meetings happen in the workplace and may become a sensible solution for Quakers to conduct some committees where not too many people are involved. It will also save journey fuel. Business should become easier, speedier and less work for all of us, and that would be a good thing. It has already, some will insist. There is, though, a terrible tendency to get so carried away with the ease with which documents can be printed and duplicated that the result is sometimes more office work and a huge amount of printed paper. Ours is a religious group, not a business and so it should always remain.

What about the inner warmth of our house, the spiritual core? There is no reason for Quakers to deviate from our long held traditions of seeing something of good, something of God, in everyone, our utter distaste for war, our endeavours to follow as George Fox did the teachings of Jesus, even though some of our members feel uncomfortable in calling themselves Christian. It's not what you call yourself but who you are that matters more. As long as we keep looking out of the windows to see the needs of others and the changes in the world then we can feel confident as we head into the future.

So how will our new house look? It will be painted green, have large windows to look out of and welcome fresh ideas in. There will be a big front door for newcomers and lots of space for children. There will be far less work in it, some of the old furniture and a lot of the clobber will have gone. Our principles and our business methods will stay the same. We shall still be the same family, a wonderful mix of people, happier and more cheerful.



This essay is concerned with the ordinary members of the Society, the elderly with their wisdom and patience, the younger members with their energy, the attenders, inquirers and the children. For it is these that make up the most important group for keeping our Society alive. It is also a short essay as this writer feels there is no real need to extend into details of management, finance, outreach and suchlike. These groups are doing and will continue doing wonderful work and will adapt as necessary to the future provided Friends can maintain a vigorous and robust gathering of grassroots Quakers. That is where our strength lies.

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