

Epistle of Southern Friends Summer School 2011

To all Friends everywhere,

Between the 20th and the 27th of August 76 young people and 23 staff gathered at Saffron Walden Friends School to explore the theme of 'Dealing with conflict as a Quaker'.

Throughout the week speaker sessions were all valued for both their spiritual and emotional content. Paul Ingram's talk on his work with B.A.S.I.C was interesting and topical. Staff members Candia and Sam talked about nonviolence, being an activist and their experiences campaigning. James Bewsher talked about being a Quaker in the military. He shared his inner conflicts, and how the Quaker community reacted to his role in the military. Alan Pleydell talked about how conflict can divide communities, but how slowly divisions were overcome. The fact that the staff are so involved in the topic of dealing with conflict and making a difference in the world helped us relate to the topic this year.

Each evening we signed up for an activity these ranged from: Morris dancing, swimming, 'environmental art', making the Summer School newspaper, the Big Quaker discussion group, making bunting, nail painting, making costumes for the disco, face painting and footie.

Audley End was brilliant - everyone was spooked by the teddy bears and enjoyed the 'short walk' there. Another outing we went on was to Cambridge where it was sunny from the very start. We had an emotional meeting for worship in Jesus Lane Meeting house. Another aspect of Cambridge we all enjoyed was a community café with a 'Free Shop' which was closing down, where we acquired toasters, chairs and lamps. And then gave most of it back.

In the afternoons we enjoyed many social sessions including the space themed disco, the annual barn dance, and making friendship bracelets for the MPs in protest at the largest arms fair in the world held in London this September. We also took part in a bit of drama. In the Forum Theatre session the audience became 'spectacular spectators' by intervening in scenes made from conflicts as we have experienced them to change the ending for the better. We learnt how to be an up-stander not a bystander, and to stop the conflicts around us in a nonviolent way.

Epilogue during the evening was a very special time for all of us. It gave us time to reflect on the day and gave people the opportunity to minister from their personal experiences.

Over the week friendships grew, overcoming age boundaries and the normal status quo was soon forgotten. The secret friends made everyone feel special and included in making summer school a happier place. Mikey from the kitchen became a particular favourite, but was left alone after the polite restraining order issued by the staff.

This year people felt that summer school made everyone feel included, and there was a great sense of community. Life-long friendships were made during the week.

At the business meeting it was agreed that the theme for Summer School 2012 will be 'Quakers around the world'.

Signed in and on behalf of Summer School

Gabriel Meurer-Wilde and Myfanwy Carville, Clerks

Olwyn Shorey and Dominic McGann, Elders