

NONTHEIST FRIENDS NETWORK

www.nontheist-quakers.org.uk

January 2015

A NOT-TO-BE-MISSED CONFERENCE!

It's been a busy and expensive year for many of us. Yearly Meeting Gathering and other Quaker events bit into our purses and made inroads into our time and energies. So it's not surprising that firm bookings for our NFN conference at Woodbrooke in March have been slower than usual. But now we are into a new year, and it's time to move back into top gear!

This is likely to be **our most important conference since the Network was inaugurated** four years ago. Since then we have all worked hard to make the case for an open and diverse Religious Society of Friends, theologically inclusive and rainbow-coloured. Our Network has remained small in numbers – we do not proselytise – but influential in making the Society a more comfortable home for Friends who don't fit the traditional moulds, or choose to be “Godless for God's sake”.

The general trend within the Society over the past half-century has been a steady move from an exclusive to an inclusive community. We acknowledge our Christian roots but are no longer exclusively Christian, welcoming into membership Universalists, Buddhists and Friends who see religion in all its forms as a wholly human creation, natural rather than supernatural, open to new light from secular as well as religious sources.

Our vision is of a Society in which Friends of many persuasions can explore and celebrate their diversity, united by commitment to the Quaker Way rather than a prescribed set of beliefs.

But this vision is now under threat. Some Friends seem concerned to halt the trend towards greater inclusiveness and put it into reverse. The 2014 Swarthmore Lecture has brought the question to the fore: Do we want an exclusive or an inclusive Society?

And that's the question at the heart of our forthcoming NFN conference. Jan Arriens is our keynote speaker, and he's an inspired choice! Jan has made a huge contribution to Quaker thinking and action through his work in the Quaker Universalist Group and as founder and leader of Lifelines, the international organisation befriending and supporting prisoners on Death Row in the United States. He's a convinced Friend, a quiet nontheist who puts his Quakerism first and bridges theist and nontheist approaches.

But this conference needs you and your contributions too! We may be at a turning point. Can you afford to miss it? **David Boulton**

*** Booking form is an appendix to this document***

Woodbrooke Weekend Conference: March 20-22nd 2015

An Inclusive Society of Friends

**Exploring ways in which Friends can
live, work, and worship
in harmony**

with Jan Arriens – author of *Journeys in the Light*. *He writes:*

Far from being a radical offshoot at variance with traditional Quakerism, nontheism may be regarded as a logical development within liberal Quakerism. Its roots may be traced back to the Manchester Conference of 1895 and the emphasis placed by Rufus Jones on the mystical tradition.

Nontheism and religious belief may also be approached in terms of the distinction drawn by Karen Armstrong between *mythos* and *logos*. Was the way in which early Friends perceived and articulated the *mythos* in fact inherently different from what contemporary Friends are saying? The two aspects of head and heart need to be kept in balance; we need neither uncritical evangelism nor logic to the exclusion of the mystery.

Jan will open his consideration of our theme on the Friday evening.

Workshops

We have three workshops planned for the Saturday morning – each presented twice. ***We are open to offers from Friends who wish to present any other workshops twice that morning. If you do, please notify the Clerk by the end of February, so that I can notify the Steering Group for discernment.*** People will be able to attend two workshops of their choice.

An exercise of prayer

How can nontheists pray? (if they wish to). When I dropped God, I dropped prayer. In recent years I have re-evaluated the concept, and now practice ways in which I explore the wonder of life and relationships, examine myself both positively and critically, and fashion a way of considering my response to people and issues to which wish to make a difference. Years ago, I used to worship, to confess, to give thanks, and to ask God for all sorts of things. I have a found a new liberty and spiritual vigour in adopting practices that are not addressed to God –

but are life-enhancing. The workshop will give people an opportunity to try out some of these ideas. **Michael Wright**

A fish out of water?

This group will combine sharing about:

- What makes life easier for a non-theist in their local meeting?
- What makes life more difficult for a non-theist in their local meeting?

I hope we shall focus on ways of understanding and being part of a Quaker organisation which has a wide variety of ideas about what a Quaker should be, and that people will feel supported as a result. **Miriam Branson**

Mind your Language

- What do we mean by 'inclusive' language?
- What is 'exclusive' language?
- How does inclusive/exclusive language make us feel, and what, therefore, are the implications for inreach and outreach?

This workshop aims to give us an opportunity to share our thoughts and experiences on these questions.

Jean and Brian Wardrop

There may be other workshops – further news next month.

Saturday afternoon – freetime to walk, sleep, explore the library, visit Cadbury World, chat or read – amongst other relaxations.

Annual General Meeting

This will take place from 4.30 – 6 p.m. on Saturday

Quaking with Laughter

This will again be a session of all the fun that Friends can devise. Please consider, over the next couple of months, something entertaining to share with us all that evening. It could be amusing, light-hearted, or a brain-teaser, music you make, a poem or a song, even a video presentation! Do let us know what you are willing to offer.

Plenary discussion

On Sunday morning, between breakfast (and clearing our rooms) and Meeting for Worship at 11, we will have a plenary discussion on how to take forward ideas that will have emerged from our speaker, from our workshops, and informal discussions on ways in which we can, individually and/or with others in the Network or in our own Meetings, contribute to ensuring our Society remains and grows as an Inclusive Society of Friends.

Please complete and return this form, together with payment by cheque made out to "Nontheist Friends Network", to NFN Annual Conference, 8 Ashleigh Grove, Newcastle upon Tyne. NE12 8EY



Nontheist
Friends Network

BOOKING FORM

Nontheist Friends Network 2015 Residential Conference

Woodbrooke 20-22 March 2015

CONTACT DETAILS:

Name(s)

Address:

Town/City: Postcode:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Area meeting:

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS:

Type of diet: Anything Vegetarian Veg/Fish Vegan
(tick one)

Special needs: Non-diary Diabetic Gluten-free Low-fat
(tick those applicable)

ACCESS:

Please tell us about any way we might be able to assist you in your conference participation:

Sight Hearing Mobility Other

Please give details:

RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION: (£195 per person, Members £185 per person)

All rooms are en-suite. Do you require: single room(s) double room

DAY ATTENDANCE (non-residential): Please tick those applicable

Fri evening (£21 inc supper) Sat (9am-5pm) (£31 inc lunch) Sat (9am-9pm) (£52 inc lunch & supper) Sun morning (£31 inc lunch)

CANCELLATION POLICY:

After January 10th we can only offer part-reimbursement or none at all, depending on how close your cancellation is to the conference date and whether we are able to re-let your room if you have booked residential accommodation.