

Support on the streets

Somewhere on the internet there is a photo of a large banner saying Justice for Asylum Seekers. Behind the banner are some Quakers and Anglicans, a rabbi, and some exuberant teenagers who recently gave support to our fortnightly vigil outside the cathedral in Birmingham. On that occasion we had several positive approaches from passers-by; one of our members used his professional expertise to give an impromptu advice session to an asylum-seeker from Sudan; and a young Frenchman who had been juggling in another part of the churchyard donated us his hatful of change.

This regular vigil is only one of the initiatives taken by Warwickshire MM Asylum Group, and has over the last six months

become a regular feature in the asylum map of the city. Many Friends are involved in befriending and other aspects of social support, but the Asylum Group has also given itself the task of educating and informing Friends about the broader political context. To this end we have been a constant presence in the MM over the last four years, offering workshops, study days and informative documents with suggestions for action.

Other activities have included a visit to Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre when six of us spent a day in discussion with staff and being shown around the whole complex; a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights which was printed

as part of the evidence in their report on the treatment of asylum-seekers; and close involvement in setting up and supporting the national Quaker Asylum Network.

In the centre of all this activity are of course the asylum-seekers, whose shameful treatment by our government is something George Fox would surely have identified as being worthy of our condemnation in his call to 'be a terror to all the adversaries of God'.

As we walk cheerfully in spite of everything, we need to be aware what our Quaker obedience demands of us – to 'tread and trample all that is contrary under.' And that has to include government policy on asylum.

Barbara Forbes
Network convenor

Quakers on Pemba Island

Feeling constrained to tell my Lenten study group of Quakers' part in the anti-slavery movement, I was reminded of my grandparents' work freeing slaves on Pemba Island, East Africa.

In 1890 a British Protectorate was proclaimed over Zanzibar and Pemba and the British government appointed the Sultan. Slavery was still rife in British Protectorates and in 1895 *The Spectator* suggested that English Quakers should purchase property on Pemba Island where there were possibly 80,000 slaves and that they should 'govern and educate' the emancipated slaves, there being no mission of any kind on the island.

On 31 December 1896, Theodore Burt, a Quaker farmer from Lincolnshire, having offered himself for service in setting up and running such a mission, set

out with Henry Stanley Newman (one time editor of *The Friend*) to make preliminary investigations.

In April 1897 Herbert Armitage offered to go out to Pemba to help Theodore and, at YM in May, Theodore's wife, Jessie, and Celia Armitage, Herbert's sister, spoke to Friends saying they believed the Lord was guiding them to go, too. Their offer was accepted and YM adopted the mission as its own.

Herbert Armitage went to Pemba the same month and land was bought at Banani, a promontory west of Chaki-Chaki – very fertile and well planted with cloves, coconut palms and mangoes – the sale going through in August.

In 1897 abolition of the legal status of slavery was passed by the Sultan of Zanzibar.

In January 1898, Jessie Burt, Celia Armitage and Arnold Wigham

of Dublin set off for Pemba. So was born the Friends' Industrial Mission for the emancipation and education of slaves on the island of Pemba most of whom continued to work on the plantations but – free!

Jessie Burt left a baby and two small children in the care of their grandparents when she joined her husband. Her sister, Emily Hutchinson, also went out to help with the teaching of girls.

Two more children were born to Theodore and Jessie, a son Arnold Wigham in 1900 and a daughter, Elizabeth, in 1903, who in later life became my mother.

Jessie had some years in England after catching Blackwater Fever but returned around 1919 until she and Theodore retired and came back to live in Lincolnshire.

Marian H Wilby, Kirkby
Stephen Meeting, Cumbria