

Spiritual Hospitality at the Pales
Wardens' Biennial Report, 2005-2007

The Pales increasingly feels to us a place of pilgrimage. This feeling comes to us from within and without: from ourselves, and others, from Quakers and non-Quakers, from Christians and those of other faiths, from those familiar with the Pales and those new to it. It has been brought into focus by our joining the "Small Pilgrim Places" network (<http://www.smallpilgrimplaces.org.uk/>), as well as many comments in our visitors book.

"This whole place is a Hearing Loop – a place to hear God"

"Thank you for making me peaceful today".

"One with God".

"About 2½ years ago I picked up a leaflet about the Pales. I phoned you... for an Enquirers Pack... This is just to say that I have just been accepted into membership of ... MM and to say Thank You for the first point of contact."

It has, perhaps, ever been thus: from the first days when George Fox visited here or close by, 350 years ago, to such an astonishing reception, to the early days of persecution, when Friends were dragged away to prison, to subsequent escape to America – how easy we have it!

As a place of worship our "average" attendance has crept from 6 to 7, but many meetings greatly exceed this. Two Christmas Meetings have seen 40, and 75 in attendance, respectively. We increasingly are joined by visitors from other meetings, mostly but not entirely from within our Monthly Meeting.

It is now almost exactly fourteen years since we came to the Pales, and we feel, at last, that we have finished the first phase, of "developing the Pales Vision". Our initial brief was to build on the Macphersons' excellent restoration work, and get the Pales more widely used, especially as a place of outreach and spiritual hospitality. The early work was largely physical – heating, water, replacing windows – latterly, it has felt more sublime, improving the spiritual quality of the experience that visitors and users can expect when coming here – the woodland, the Meditation Pond, the garden (not to mention the enhanced toilet experience!). We are proud to have been so highly commended by workers in the disability field for our considerable efforts to be inclusive in this direction: accessible toilets, hearing loops in both rooms, providing wheelchair access to the Meeting House. "If it can be done at the Pales, it can be done anywhere", as one expert put it.

Thanks to our new secure storage facilities, we are able to increase the resources we can offer to groups, such as fridge, cookers, microwave, OHP slide and computer projectors, wireless Internet access, video, etc..

Our literature stall (an excellent use for an ex-bier!) has grown steadily, with a number of new titles ("Ancient Friends", "Radnorshire Quakers and the Welsh

Revival of 1904", and "Sufferings and Openings"), since our last report, as well as new leaflets, fliers and cards. This continues to be a major means of outreach as well as a substantial source of income.

So what of the usage in practice? The Pales is generally pretty much booked up during the weekends of the "season" – Easter to Autumn – with some longer bookings, such as Spirit Trek, who book for a whole week of glorious retreat from a South London Meeting! Indeed, we have noticed a very clear trend over the last few years towards more "spiritual" events, typically of the retreat type, as opposed to the earlier emphasis we had on more craft-orientated events. We welcome this greatly, and it is our greatest hope that this trend will continue and grow. Please, please, spread the word that the Pales is available and suitable as a retreat centre.

Events continue to expand our horizons: Spirit Trek, Travelling Light, Link Weekends, BYM Quaker Structures Group, Friends in Wales, Monthly Meeting Retreat Days, PM Retreat Days, , Leaveners Young Women's Arts Weekends, plus many uses by non-Quaker groups including Powys Mediation, Small Pilgrim Places, U3A, Yoga and Meditation Classes and Retreats, Lower Ithon Churches, Yarpole Churches Together, Hereford Churches Together, Women's Institute, Mothers Union, school visits, Baptists, Presbyterians, Annibynwyr, Buddhists, Bahai's, Vedantists, even Llandegley Church in Wales – it's truly wonderful!

We also are privileged to provide a space for individuals on their spiritual quests, such as Friends travelling in the Ministry, and a local builder on a two-day Tai Chi meditation retreat (and thanks to him for his donation of the new block's shower unit). Others also minister through their gifts: plants, resources, food for events, skills such as pruning and dry-stone walling. We continue to be immensely grateful to the Probation Service for providing and organising labour to help the Pales (most recently, gravestone cleaning) as a part of Community Service.

As with any place of spiritual significance, the Pales is used as a site for Rites of Passage. Since our last report, we have had two funerals, a Thanksgiving Ceremony and several Scattering of Ashes, with two weddings on the horizon!

Looking to the future, we hope for greater usage: our Monthly Meeting knows the treasure we have here, but we feel greater use could be made by Friends in Wales and across Britain Yearly Meeting – all are indeed truly welcome to participate in and share our spiritual hospitality.... and to return again and again, as do many of our daily visitors. Again, from the Visitors' Book:

"This little haven has touched my heart"

"We feel moved to be here"

"We had to come back, we love this place"

"A sense of God"