



# ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter March - April 2024

**Peace Pole to be planted on Sat 6th April at 3pm - please come!** Our Peace Pole fund received a huge boost of £250 from the family of Beryl Davidson in her memory. We plan to erect the pole before a ceremony with the Mayor of Abingdon. Come & bring your friends!

**AGM Notice. Could you be our new treasurer?** Our AGM will follow our online meeting on Tuesday 19th March at about 9.15pm. All welcome. We are especially keen to hear from you if you would be willing to take on the role of treasurer. We have a small turnover so it is not a huge commitment, but Denise has been "it" for 20 years now and wants a break! An ideal role for someone who can't help in other ways?

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**This month's meeting:  
Tuesday 19th March 8pm online**

## Revealed: Military Influences on UK Nuclear Power Decisions

In this webinar run jointly with Salisbury CND, we are privileged to hear from Andy Stirling, Professor of Science and Technology Policy at the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex, where one of his research interests is the "concealed links between military and civilian nuclear infrastructures".

Andy & his colleague Dr Phil Johnstone have long argued, despite official hostility, ridicule, obfuscation and denial, that "civil nuclear represents a hidden bulwark that maintains the production, maintenance and potential employment of Britain's arsenal of nuclear weapons."



Yet on 11th Jan 2024 the Dept for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ) published a 'Civil Nuclear Roadmap' which it says "marks the start of longer-term strategic collaboration between DESNZ and MoD". In this astonishing volte face, the DESNZ has effectively now abandoned its previous efforts to deny the importance of military drivers of UK civil nuclear policy and is now openly emphasising its significance.

As Andy says, "the Government may hope to be able after a while to get away with pointing to what is in fact a new strategy. We have a limited window to expose this naked example of nuclear misrepresentation."

See this 2021 article: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/why-is-support-for-nuclear-power-noisiest-just-as-its-failures-become-most-clear/>

To join our Zoom meeting, click this link any time after 7.30pm:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101?pwd=RmxHLzBQaXlHYjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09>

Meeting ID: 913 1513 4101 Passcode: 015836

Few of us knew much about Colombia until the account by Dr Andrei Gomez-Suarez and Dr Gwen Burnyeat. We now know that it is in South America and that one of its major exports is cocoa beans from which chocolate is produced and also that the capital city is Bogotá.

Less well known is that for at least the last 200 years it has been in a state of conflict, involving FARC, a guerrilla group gang of right wing factions, causing civil society about 7 million displacements and 200 disappearances. This situation does not preoccupy the Western media much. Drs Andrei and Gwen are practical academics working in the UK and Colombia. Andrei is a co-founder of "Embrace the dialogue"\*. Gwen is an anthropologist with considerable research experience, who tries to bring the complex strands together to explore ways leading to peace. They gave a full account of their learning experience - what they had achieved and the pitfalls to their work and the flexible approach to conveying the errors.

Mention was made of the Peace process in Northern Ireland, as something which has also to be continually worked on. After the break up of Apartheid in South Africa, the truth sessions were found to be both difficult and helpful. In general it was found important to have groups at ground level working for peace, to prevent disinformation, especially during referendums.

Peace starts from the ground upwards; it cannot be imposed from above. Eat chocolate for peace!\*\*

*Tony & Oonagh Godfrey.*

\*Rodeemos el Dialogo <https://uk.rodeemoseldialogo.org/>

\*\*Gwen's film "Chocolate of Peace" about her work with the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó is a joy to watch: <https://chocolatedepaz.com/english>

**You can watch a recording** of January's talk here: <https://youtu.be/bha4Sq7E2Xo?si=uARZsJfKSq9w8MFW> - do watch it to the end - the Q&A was moving and informative.

### **Stories of Peace Campaigners reach a wider audience!**

Abingdon U3A meets at Preston Road Community Centre and has a weekly attendance of 100-150. A recent lecture there (by Liz Woolley, a renowned local historian) was about Olive Gibbs (1918 -1995). Some of the audience knew of her campaigning to save nursery education, to prevent the demolition of the Jericho area and also to stop a proposed motorway through Christchurch Meadow. However, her work as a founding member, and later Chair, of CND would not have been known and was well covered by the speaker.

All present-day peace campaigners stand on the shoulders of people like Olive (and Bruce Kent who was among those who were at the unveiling of a commemorative blue plaque at Christchurch Old Building, Osney Lane, Oxford where Olive was born) whose work and commitment need always to be remembered and shared with others.

*Anne Dodd*

### **Lanterns from Hiroshima**

Hideko, a Japanese lady who has previous connections with Abingdon, would like to send us lanterns made by Japanese children to float on the Thames. We think we could do this from the ramp at St Helen's Wharf, with people watching from the wharf or from over the river. We could gather before dark at the Peace Pole in St Ethelwold's garden to light our lanterns and walk down to the river with them. This will probably be on Friday 9th August (Nagasaki Day). More in the next newsletter!

### **Webinar on the human and environmental cost of Britain's nuclear weapons testing**

Parliamentary CND - which represents cross-party MPs and Peers who support nuclear disarmament - invites you to [join them](#) for a webinar on March 14th at 1pm exploring the legacy of British nuclear weapons testing. CND says "We are honoured and privileged to have the Kiribati Ambassador to the UN join us for this event, where he will share his country's efforts to get restorative justice. All welcome!" If the link does not work find it on the CND website!

“Peace is every step” - a multi-faith walk for peace, non-violence and reconciliation.



At least two people from Abingdon took part in the multi-faith ‘Peace is every step’ event in central London on 21<sup>st</sup> January. The title of the event is taken from the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk who devoted his life to teaching peace and non-violence, and is credited with bringing ‘Mindfulness’ to the West.

The event attracted over 1,000 people, heard prayers for peace from ten

different faith representatives and walked down Whitehall in powerful contemplative silence for an hour. We hadn’t realised that this had never been done before. Of course, silent vigils for peace are regular features of our witness, and people of many different faiths work for peace. So why did we do it?

Thich Nhat Hanh founded Plum Village in France, from which communities in other countries have sprung to continue his legacy. Rehena Harilall from Plum Village UK reached out to Quakers, as another contemplative peace faith, to see if we could organise something positive together at this time of such horror, death and destruction. As interfaith officer for Quakers nationally I said ‘Yes’, and then worked together with a Quaker Peace colleague and Rehena and another Plum Village colleague.

After much careful discussion with people from many other faiths the silent Peace Walk was decided upon. Because words are so difficult, potentially so divisive and able to be misunderstood, we decided that there would be no placards, no banners, no shouted slogans. A representative from each faith was invited to offer a prayer for peace, or share words of wisdom for peace if their tradition does not say prayers. The message was to be worn by people spread along the route as they walked, so that the public could read what we were doing. We wanted the message to be positive, so it was a multi-faith walk for peace, for non-violence, for reconciliation. We spoke of all the wars and armed conflicts in the world – around 32 – not just Ukraine and Israel/Palestine. Each walker had been invited to make and wear a white flower for peace. We invited people of ‘all faiths and none’.

The links at the end will take you to Rehena’s introduction, along with all the prayers for peace from the ten different faith representatives: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian, Bahá’i, Hindu, Druid and Buddhist. It seems some people were astonished that so many different faiths had agreed to engage. I think it was because the walk was a prayer-led and prayer-full positive event for peace. It was not a civic or secular event to which faiths were invited. It was also about all wars and we weren’t asking people to sign up to something but simply to share from their tradition. I’ve never been involved in organising anything where everyone said ‘Yes’ so immediately and enthusiastically, and then got on and ‘did stuff’.

The pace of the walk was slow, set by a Buddhist nun. We walked from Trafalgar Square, down Whitehall, round Parliament Square, back up Whitehall, pausing outside Downing Street, past the Cenotaph, then back to Trafalgar Square. It took about an hour. I found it a profound experience, deeply moving and positive. People fell silent as we walked past, the police were at a discreet distance controlling the traffic, the stewards did not have to put into practice any of their training about dealing with disruptive elements. Some of our faith representatives linked arms, all enjoyed themselves.

What difference did it make? Like any peace rally, vigil, demo or meeting it made a difference to the people who participated. We hope it also lifted the energy for peace in a place where people take decisions about war. For the Jewish and Muslim representatives there was joy in the solidarity that they felt from the gathered people and the other faith representatives.

We hope that the walk helped the link between strengthening inner peace for outer peace action. We have heard of other silent multi-faith actions since, and we are being asked when we might organise another walk. Who knows?! We are delighted that our idea seems to be inspiring others.

A very short film, set to music, of the event can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EreVxZSRUFI>

Other links which might be of interest, including further links to the introduction and the prayers: [Peace is Every Step: hundreds join silent walk in central London \(part 1\) - Plum Village UK](https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/peace-is-every-step-thousands-join-silent-peace-walk)  
<https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/peace-is-every-step-thousands-join-silent-peace-walk>

*Judith Baker*

### **A personal reflection on the Abingdon Peace Group weekly vigil**

We know that witnessing and vigilling is solidarity in action – a way of being in support of others who are taking risks – sometimes very great risks – in working for a more just and peaceful world. It can be hard, though, sometimes as we stand at the War Memorial each week with our banner facing the Monday morning traffic not to question the value of what we do. Our banner used to read IN SOLIDARITY WITH PEACE MAKERS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE. In the context of the present situation in Gaza, the banner now reads IN SOLIDARITY WITH PEACE MAKERS IN ALL CONFLICTS

Two things have recently given me a renewed sense of purpose – something I read and a person I met.

What I read was a few lines from a book by international activist Rebecca Solnit – an anecdote by a member of Women Strike for Peace (WSP), the first great anti-nuclear movement in the US, the one that contributed to a major victory: the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty which brought about the end of above ground testing of nuclear weapons and of much of the radioactive fallout that was showing up in mothers' milk and baby teeth.

*"The woman from WSP told me of how foolish and futile she felt standing in the rain one morning outside the White House. Years later, she heard Dr Benjamin Spock – who had become one of the most high-profile activists on the issue – say that the turning point for him was spotting a small group of women standing in the rain, protesting at the White House. If they were so passionately committed, he thought, he should give the issue more consideration himself."*

The person I met was during a recent visit to a town in the Lake District. He was one of a small group of Quakers and others who continue to vigil weekly in support of peace makers in Russia and Ukraine. It brought home to me forcibly that no single group is alone; up and down the country there are groups – albeit small – of those who declare publicly that in war there are no winners. Every war eventually has to end in a negotiated settlement and those who work unseen to bring about just and peaceful ends to conflict deserve every ounce of support, in any way, and however small.

*Anne Dodd*

**Simon Love RIP**

We are sorry to report the death of Simon Love, a long-standing member of Abingdon Peace Group. Professionally, he worked as a teacher – though he also taught himself plumbing to a professional standard too! His great passions, however, were music and gardening. In latter years, he was largely responsible, in his quiet self-effacing way, for the creation of the open-to-all garden at St Ethelwold`s House in the centre of Abingdon where so many, many people have found peace and healing amidst the beauty, colour and tranquillity. It was particularly appropriate that the gathering after the funeral of his family and friends was in the garden he had helped to create.

Anne Dodd

Photo by Gianfranco Di Genova



**Eynsham Peace Oak**



Sally Mears spotted this sign when she was in Eynsham last month. The name Peace Oak refers to a remarkable Oak Tree planted in November 1919 one year after the armistice that ended the First World War. The Peace Oak Association owns and looks after a 2 acre field off Cassington Road with its entrance through Cobbetts Close. It is a beautiful site with mature trees, an orchard of apples and fruit, wildflower meadows, a pond, a small vineyard, willow creations and more. What a lovely reminder of the lasting importance of peace!

**Reporting the UK government for genocide in Gaza**

Many of us have been horrified by the failure of our government to condemn the actions of the Israeli Defence Force in Gaza. Angie Zelter has gone further, and tried to report a war crime. In January she reported the UK government to the Metropolitan Police for the crime of genocide, and urges us all to do the same. She says “I do hope as many of you as possible will do this and put in your own collection of evidence. I did not for instance mention the fact that the UK has paused vital funding for UNRWA which is obviously contributing to the genocidal impacts of the Israeli bombings and the stopping of most aid trucks being let through to Gaza. I would love to hear from any of you if you do this and any responses and if you need any help do let me know, Love and peace, Angie.” Contact her by email: [reforest@gn.apc.org](mailto:reforest@gn.apc.org)

PS For those who did not get her initial briefing and want it do let her know but the link to do the online form is

<https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/war-crimes/af/report-a-war-crime/>

Angie has now received a reply from DS Chris De Asha, War Crimes Investigations - Pod 3 Team 12, SO15 Counter Terrorism Command, saying “Thank you for your referral. We are in the process of reviewing all the material sent to us, logging and sharing with the appropriate agencies and organisations”.

Meanwhile Frances Micklem has shared the text of a letter from a group of South African lawyers to Rishi Sunak, James Cleverley, and King Charles, serving “Notice Of Intention To Hold The Government Of The United Kingdom Liable And Complicit For The Ongoing International Crimes Perpetrated In Israel / Palestine Against The Palestinian People”. The letter has been copied to the Met Police. Full text on request!

(Full text available on request)

*...The devastation in Gaza has caused anguish around the world and has left many people, especially those with connections to the region, incredibly distressed by the situation. My extended family have been sheltering in a church in a Gaza City for months now, ... I want to thank all those people in Oxford West and Abingdon who have reached out with messages of support - it has meant such a lot to my family at this most difficult time.*

*A humanitarian catastrophe is taking place in Gaza, with thousands of men, women, and children being killed by Israeli air strikes.....*

*We all remain horrified by Hamas' attacks on October 7th that shocked the world, and we must utterly condemn them. The taking of hostages is deplorable, including women, children, the disabled and the elderly. The Liberal Democrats are deeply concerned for the people who remain unaccounted for. We need to see their safe release immediately.*

*For the security of Israelis and the future of Palestinians, Hamas cannot be allowed to continue to be in charge of Gaza. But it is becoming increasingly clear that a military solution to remove Hamas is not possible.*

*In order to prevent further humanitarian disaster in Gaza, we need an immediate bilateral ceasefire. It is vital that humanitarian aid is able to get in, and that the remaining Israeli hostages are safely returned to their homes and families. ....the recent ruling by the International Court of Justice is the clearest sign yet that this is the course which must be followed.*

*Best wishes, Layla*

*Layla Moran, Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Oxford West & Abingdon*

**DIARY.** For more events see <http://www.networkforpeace.org.uk/calendar> and also the very up-to-date collection on CND Salisbury's website <https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/events>

**Every Monday except Bank Holidays 8.15 - 8.45am.** Vigil for peace. War Memorial, The Square, Abingdon.

**Every Saturday, 2-3pm, Martyrs' Memorial, St Giles, Oxford.** Women in Black vigil. All welcome (men welcome to hand out leaflets.) Contact: Carol Stavris [carol.stavris@btinternet.com](mailto:carol.stavris@btinternet.com)

**Thursday 14 March 1-2pm Parliamentary CND webinar on NW testing.** See p2.

**Tuesday 19th March 8pm on zoom.** Peace Group meeting followed by AGM (see front page).

**Sat 6th April 3-4pm, St Ethelwolds Garden.** Ceremony to mark the erection of our Peace Pole.

**Friday 10th May Lakenheath.** Probably pop-up peace camp before CND day of protest.

**Saturday 11th May Lakenheath.** CND day of protest against US nuclear weapons.

**Wednesday 15th May Tavistock Square, London.** Conscientious Objectors Day.

**Tuesday 21st May 8pm on zoom.** Abingdon Peace Group Meeting: Andrei Gomez-Suarez and Professor Mark Owen will speak on Winchester University's Centre for Religion, Reconciliation and Peace.

Corrections and contributions to this newsletter are very welcome.

Abingdon Peace Group now intends to meet on the third Tuesday of alternate months on Zoom. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part, and people with IT skills are urgently needed! The Group has no party political affiliations.

Contact us on [abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com) , 07786 055195 or (01235) 526265.