

Chapter 3: The Local Experience

I make no apology for devoting so much space to the story of local groups. To begin with there is only a few hundred words about each group, just enough to give the bare details and the occasional illustrative story. But more importantly the local group arena is perhaps the area of the Peace People experience which deserves the most attention and has received least. Simply in terms of 'activist hours' much more time was spent working on local projects and groups than was ever spent at the centre of the organisation.

As to how many group there were in total it depends on the definition of a 'group'. Particularly in the early period many 'groups' could perhaps have been better described as 'contact people'. And how long (considering the short life of some groups) did a group have to be in existence to qualify? I would estimate that a fair guess at the total number of groups (defined as a number of people meeting for a period of at least six months and concerned with issues other than just transport to the rallies) would be in the order of 80 or so, not taking into account Youth for Peace groups. I acknowledge that my estimate is just that – a guess based on what little information I have seen about all the groups I have seen mention of. If you included places where there were contact people you could probably multiply that number by two, and certainly well over a hundred groups were claimed in the early days.⁵³

Some 70 or 80 groups or 'groups being formed' are mentioned in the pages of *'Peace by Peace'*; while this source is of some information on local groups, information tends to be sporadic, non-existent for some strong groups, and totally dependent on the willingness of people to write about their own group. The latter can be presumed to be partly the difficulty in getting anybody to write anything for any publication, and in some cases an unwillingness to put into print publicly what might have been low-key or sensitive work.

Most groups were in the Greater Belfast area from Carrickfergus in the North to Lisburn in the South, and stretching to Bangor in the East. The accounts I give in this section reflect the preponderance of local activity in this geographical area. I have, however, attempted to provide some geographical balance throughout the province (and, indeed, within Belfast itself); this has, though, been tempered by an unwillingness by some I approached to discuss the Peace People and their local group – some wanted to forget, had wounds too deep, felt there was no point in discussing it, and others did not reply. In some instances I was able to win people over to discuss things, or to find someone else who was willing, but in other cases there was nothing I could do except omit the area concerned.

I have included whatever groups and areas I could get sufficient details on; if my figure of 80 Peace People 'groups' is accurate then with 26 local accounts I provide information on just under a third of the total, and certainly on the large majority of more active or longer lasting groups.

It is perhaps true that there was no coherent political or community action philosophy underlying the work. After the initial cups of tea had been drunk in the local group it was usually a matter of looking to see what needs were being unfulfilled in the area. While the group development team from the centre did its best to get around the different groups, and undoubtedly helped some to explore and develop their work, largely it was up to the local groups to see what they could come up with.

Those who did come up with worthwhile projects sometimes founded things which outlasted the groups themselves; other projects took off but later collapsed through no fault of their own. Those majority of groups which did not come up with worthwhile projects usually faded quite fast – though there are exceptions where the group provided enough in the way of support and dialogue for its individual members to mean its survival for some time.

The relationship between the central philosophy of the Peace People and the work on the ground was a tenuous one. The idea of 'community politics', as expounded by Ciaran McKeown was a radical one implying the development of an alternative structure of power based on local communities and groups doing their own thing and getting together with others to advance their wishes at a wider level. However there seems to have been little dialogue between the idea and the reality of community action as it was practised; the idea remained the idea, and community action by Peace People groups remained unaffected by it, though of course it undoubtedly helped the thrust to local involvement by groups. Many groups needed little encouragement to getting stuck in locally where possible.

⁵³ 110 groups, each with approximately forty members", for January 1977, Deutsch p.147. There may have been 110 groups listed but forty members was perhaps a fairly generous arithmetic average of the total members in the groups – active members would have been a smaller number. And membership of groups would have declined rapidly through 1977. Angela Mickley, in her perceptive paper for the Institute of Irish Studies at the Queen's University, Belfast, March 1977, on *"The Northern Irish Peace Movement and its External Effects"*, estimated 120 local groups of which 65 were in Belfast. By 21st October 1977, Fionnuala O'Connor in the "Irish Times" was saying that of the 51 groups represented at their first Assembly that month, less than half would have had more than 15 members. By the Autumn of 1980 the number of registered groups had declined to 16.

Nevertheless, during the rally phase those who were able to hear what was being said from the platforms could have been left in no doubt as to where they should be involved. Pat Johnston explained it like this:

“Every time you went to a rally you were told the best place to start was in your own area, if you don't start in your own area you can't do anything else. It was easy to say on Saturday, yeah, that's what we must do and we all knew that's what we must do. But when you got off the bus and were back in your own situation you said well, maybe such and such will do something. People were always waiting on someone to start it. A lot of people would help if someone started. And then you couldn't go into an area to start it, it had to come from within.”

Undoubtedly the majority of people who attended the rallies had no intention of getting involved locally. For some it was just not something they would have considered seriously at all. Others would have been afraid to. Yet others, as Pat Johnston explained above, would have been fired with enthusiasm at the rallies but found it difficult to know where to start, and perhaps intimidated by standing out from the crowd in their locality, for social reasons or for feelings about their own safety.

There is a wider question here, aside altogether from questions of personal safety and lack of the necessary extrovert qualities to get a new group going. That is the question of what our whole educational system does to prepare people to be involved locally with local issues, and to work effectively with other people co-operatively in groups. Insofar as political questions are raised within our educational system they tend to be either issues of global concern (the third world) or politics on a macro level within the country, i.e. at governmental level, a rarefied stratum that, while it impinges heavily on people's everyday lives, is not something which people themselves feel they can easily impinge upon.

To give the Peace People some credit, they did fund Henry Grant's community training courses. But the point I am making here is that the whole human environment in which they operated was not one conducive to involvement in anything. Particularly in Northern Ireland it is a case of heads down, be quiet; like the man said to me at the City Hall during the 'vox pop' exercise I did on the Peace People – *“I've nothin' to do with paramilitaries, peace or nothin'.”*

(Names in italics on first mention in the following denote people I spoke to regarding the respective area concerned.)

Andersonstown (West Belfast)

The Andersonstown peace group was one of the first Peace People groups formed and probably also the first to leave the organisation. An important point in understanding the Andersonstown story is that there had been people in the area before who had stood up publicly against violence. In 1972 Mary Speckman and *Tess Costello* were involved in a petition campaign which received considerable media attention – and threats and physical intimidation and beatings of these women and their families. At that time they had received 50,000 signatures for peace outside Catholic churches.

There was resentment locally that after what these women had gone through Ciaran McKeown was seen to be saying in *'Peace by Peace'* that Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan were the first women who had stood up for peace, and not amending this when its incorrectness was pointed out to him.

Brenda Conaty recalls at the very beginning of the Peace People story trying to track down whoever had been collecting signatures locally (Betty Williams) but declining to go on television as it would be better to have a new voice calling for peace (so Mairead Corrigan was asked). The Andersonstown group, like so many others, got going through organising to take people to the rallies – and they went to them all but declined to carry the famous 'Sorry' banner up the Shankill since they felt that they had nothing to be sorry for in that sense.

They supported broadening the leadership to include women from the Shankill but this was rejected. Apart from other differences with the leadership trio, controversy soon emerged. Ciaran McKeown, as editor of “Fortnight” magazine at the time, had written what he subsequently described in his book as an “unfortunate reference” to Bishop Philbin and Monsignor Mullally “lurking behind the gates of Milltown Cemetery while peace marchers were being stoned on the Falls.”

The Andersonstown group objected strongly to such criticism since, apart from being a staunchly Catholic group themselves, they felt it was by implication a lie. Bishop Philbin had merely gone behind the gates of Milltown to speak to his driver and had done all the walk himself, despite being an elderly man. Indeed, Bishop Philbin was shielded by women from the Shankill with whom he was marching against the attacks that were made on him and other marchers. The Andersonstown group felt that a basic injustice was being done to the man and the fact that he was a Catholic bishop was

immaterial to their standing up for him; Shankill Road people objected too. Ciaran McKeown did subsequently apologise both in writing to the bishop and in public but the damage was done.⁵⁴

A further controversy had come at a meeting in *Ita Woods* house when Mairead had been invited but Betty and Ciaran arrived too; they were seen not to be willing to discuss matters of controversy such as the affair regarding Bishop Philbin and Ciaran McKeown's politics. Meetings held locally were attended by between a dozen and twenty-five people; some that they held with the aim of keeping disenchanted people in the group were interpreted, they feel, as plotting against the centre and the leaders.

Tom Conaty, Brenda Conaty's husband, presented his own plan for peace in January 1977 as an alternative to Ciaran McKeown's proposals. It was certainly less ambitious and more pragmatic than McKeown's including the sentences that *"The peace movement will not become political, party-political or supra-political. It will not suggest a para-political system of control in place of what exists in the vague hope that present systems will wither away."* He also proposed working closely with churches, schools, trade unions and already existing community associations et cetera. Those I talked to in the group saw Tom Conaty's plans as his response to other people asking him to do something to prevent the Peace People going off the rails altogether.

However with the differences of opinion and the problems already mentioned, the Andersonstown group basically stopped meeting. They only wanted to criticise those who stood for violence; they saw McKeown's espousal of an alternative political system as criticism of politicians and others which they couldn't go along with.

Brenda Conaty said she didn't call any more meetings because no one would have come; she herself became involved with a monthly meeting of widows whose husbands had been killed in the troubles, and this took place in her own home. Ita Woods did attend the Killyhevlin assembly in April 1977 but that was about the last contact between the Andersonstown group and the Peace People. For them and the Peace People it was perhaps a case of first in, first out.

Ballygally, Co. Antrim

The group began in 1977 when *Hilary Wright* went around all the houses in the village with a friend to see about setting up a group. There had previously been a local peace group which had become extinct. They got 25 or so names and almost the same number of people took *'Peace by Peace'*; initially around 10 people came to meetings, most of them retired people.

Hilary Wright saw the group, composed of Catholics and Protestants, as being very important for reconciliation in an area where there was no common meeting place across the divide. It was mainly a group to talk and discuss, their meetings were arranged to coincide with the distribution time of *'Peace by Peace'*; some fundraising was done for the Peace People. But many friends were made, and kept, through the group.

However people began to get the impression as time went on that the Peace People was becoming too political, too critical of the police and not just concerned with reconciliation. There was plenty of discussion, about these issues in the group, and Hilary Wright tried to persuade people to put their comments across to Fredheim and to Ciaran McKeown (who was seen as the symbol of going political). When they rang up with their comments they felt there was no interest in what they said, despite exhortations from the centre to provide feedback and comments.

Then a few of them got together and wrote in their comments, that they were keen on the ideas of the Peace People but had a couple of problems (including the rumour of forming a political party); they wanted an answer but received none. They also tried to phone the office a few times to discuss the matter with Ciaran McKeown but did not succeed and received the impression that Ciaran didn't want to talk to them. This impression may have come through the normal jumbling and mumbling that goes on in offices whereby callers sometimes get lost in the shuffle; one comment from Fredheim on this was that if Ciaran had known someone was on the line for him to discuss matters like this he would certainly have taken it since he thrived on controversy. Hilary Wright also attended the Derry assembly (March 1979) and spoke to Peter McLachlan (then chairperson) about the contents of their letter; his comment that that's the way things were didn't satisfy her either.

Gradually people lost interest in the Ballygally Peace Group, principally through the impression as stated that their views weren't being considered and that the leaders couldn't be influenced. When Hilary Wright had to go into hospital for a hip operation nobody took over arranging the meetings or the distribution of *'Peace by Peace'* and the group effectively folded by the start of 1980.

⁵⁴ McKeown p.227, Deutsch p. 153-158, *'Fortnight'* No. 140, 14th January 1977.

Ballymena, Co. Antrim

(See interview with Marion Graham in the interview section for the main details.)

The group, which initially met in a room leased to the Social Services Committee by the Council, more latterly has met in people's houses since the Social Services Committee folded up. Meetings on a fortnightly basis in the earlier days were held to coincide with the distribution of *'Peace by Peace'* and they sold 350 copies regularly early on. They still take and sell 25 copies but just to regulars as they don't have the people to sell them around more generally. When paper selling was done widely in the early days they sometimes found themselves run out of local housing estates.

Some members of the Ballymena group were probably involved in the Ballymena PACE (Protestant and Catholic Encounter) group before the Peace People, and some who became involved certainly had been up to the Witness for Peace meetings at the City Hall, Belfast.

While members did get steamed up about particular issues in relation to the Peace People, and over things Ciaran McKeown might have written in the paper, or over justice issues, there were no defections from the group. The only losses were through normal reasons such as people moving elsewhere. It's possible the fact that it was a group taking a pro-peace, ecumenical stand locally in a strongly loyalist area helped group cohesion. Ciaran McKeown in fact did a series of meetings with the group on trying to improve themselves as peace persons.

The Ballymena group had contact with a couple of other groups around in the earlier days. They held a number of joint meetings with the rather smaller Kilrea group, and they also used to invite the small group in Ballygally to come to things as well; there was also some contact with the group in Antrim.

There are still around 20 people involved in the Ballymena group, which meets as often as it needs, perhaps once every few months. The current chairperson of the group is Eileen Symonds. Particularly through Marion and Norman Graham they have had strong links with the farm project in Coleraine.

Ballynafeigh (South Belfast)

Ballynafeigh Peace Group, one of three remaining Peace People local groups today, was formed through meetings at Ballynafeigh Community House organised by Ena Hart-Jones and others. Some people from the area, including Catherine Hanna and Mina Caskey had already been to Andersonstown for the first rally when Betty asked people to come out. Up to 60 people were at the early Ballynafeigh meetings but numbers declined after the rallies. Today there are 14 members of the group and they meet once a month.

The aim of the Ballynafeigh group is reconciliation in and around its area at the Ormeau Road. To this end they organise socials to which they have invited Catholic women from the Markets and Protestants from Ballynafeigh, they attend socials elsewhere, and they try to get Protestants to attend Catholic-organised events, and vice versa. A couple of members sell 75 copies of *'Peace by Peace'* door to door – at one time they sold up to 150 but while members will help with different things most aren't too keen on paper selling. They have done fundraising for Ethiopia and causes closer to home, including Youth for Peace. They occasionally get new members, and also lose ones through illness or death.

Catherina Hanna and Mina Caskey found the period around the time of the 1980 'split' very confusing. A few members did leave just before Peter McLachlan's departure. A row developed one evening during a joint beetle drive with other nearby groups and some few people walked out. Ena Hart-Jones herself left the group following the 'split' but friendly relations were maintained between Ena and the group; Ena had become involved in community work locally through her involvement in the Peace People and went on to become chairperson of Ballynafeigh Community Development Association which runs the Community House – indeed she was chairperson at the time of her death in the autumn of 1986. As Ena, Catherine and Mina attested, each would help each other with events they were organising.

The Ballynafeigh group is pleased to be a mixed group in a mixed area. They continue to be as active as they can, doing the things mentioned above, sometimes painting slogans off walls, sometimes helping people with problems like an elderly woman who was afraid her windows would be broken by bricks from the skip sitting outside her house – they got the skip moved. In the past they also organised meetings with representatives from different political interests, including the UDA, in the Community House.

Botanic (South Central Belfast)

A few people who had been involved in Women Together and People Together organised a meeting which was attended by 8 or 9 people; they decided to organise a bus to go to the rallies, and initially 30 or 40 people would have gone from their

area. It became clear people were interested in doing something locally and a group was formed, with about 15 people involved though more would support events and the like.

The group was lucky to have – as was the Peace People – through the involvement of John and *Shirley Morrow* access to the meeting facilities of the Presbyterian (chaplaincy) Centre. Shirley Morrow feels that what was a split with the Peace People as a whole was reflected in two sides in the Botanic Peace Group; this being the Queen's University area there were some who were very much into ideas, and others who wanted to be involved in practical, neighbourhood activities, and it was difficult to hold the two sides together.

But the group as a whole did a lot. One principal focus was youth work and there was no facilities for young people. Discos were set up using the Presbyterian Centre and parents were also involved. Out of this came the search for suitable premises and the group pushed to have the old Victoria College building in Lower Crescent turned into a youth centre; Peter Mciachlan took up the idea and it was set up as an independent entity. At the same time as the Botanic youth group, for such it had become, moved to use the Crescent, it became an independent entity from the peace group (though both are now extinct).

There was an attempt by the group to improve police/community relations through using the 'blue lamp' discos and police community relations buses. At the time of local elections in 1978 they organised a well-attended public forum for all the local candidates to speak and be questioned; all attended except the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party). They started an ecumenical carol service which met in the open air the first year, after which the churches and others took it under their own wing, and this continues today. The group was also involved in issues regarding housing and road development proposals for a while.

However people in the group felt they weren't being listened to or that what they said didn't count with the centre of the Peace People. Some members who helped out with cleaning Fredheim after it opened received the feeling that no one cared they were there or treated them as part of a team. Some had been worried throughout about the concentration on personalities within the Peace People. A few did Henry Grant's training courses but this only added to their frustration, feeling they didn't have the space within the Peace People to use the training they received. In the end, after 3 or 4 years, the group broke off from the Peace People but decided to keep together in informal contact to continue their involvements locally.

Cloughfern (North Belfast)⁵⁵

This group was a very active one which eventually died, as *Eddie McCotter* explained, more through exhaustion than anything else. It had been formed at the rally stage when people from their area got together and initially the group had around 20 people involved and then numbers stabilised at around 12; the group ceased to function around 1981.

As well as being involved in local meetings and discussion groups, Cloughfern Peace Group sold several hundred copies of '*Peace by Peace*' around door to door though they had only 30 or 40 regular customers. They also for a short while produced and sold 2,000 copies of a local community magazine – something which for people power reasons they could only keep up for 6 months. They were also involved in things like clean-up campaigns on litter, and organising fishing trips, football matches and Christmas parties.

One project which they were involved in that still flourishes today was the setting up of a non-aligned (i.e. non-church) youth club, particularly for those not too keen on participating in church-organised ones. There were already a few people involved in this locally but the peace group provided the nucleus and driving force for fundraising and converting a row of loose boxes into youth club premises; they raised £8,000 locally, got a small grant from the Peace People Trust, and a Department of Education grant. The youth club still operates successfully today.

But Cloughfern Peace Group itself ceased to operate around 1981. Eddie McCotter said one or two people did depart at the time of the 'split' in 1980, and one person took exception to the Peace People policy on H Block, but that the cessation of activities was more to do with wear and tear and trying to do too much for too small a group – they didn't increase their membership to the extent necessary to do their work, and eventually through overwork people opted out of the group. Eddie McCotter himself was also heavily involved in central Peace People activities – on the Trust and Company, the Executive, and in group development work.

⁵⁵ See profile of the group and Eddie Cotter in '*Peace by Peace*' Vol. 5 No.13.

Derry

(See interview with Margaret O'Donnell, Michael Durey, Sam Brown and Peter Simpson in the interview section for the main details.)

The Peace and Reconciliation Centre, originally set up as a group in August 1976, has continued to expand its work since it severed its connection with the Peace People in 1980. It has a number of project areas including a mutual co-operation project, which includes transportation of groups by minibus, various kinds of sports matches after which the teams are invited to social evenings, and also holidays and parties for pensioners.

They were involved in the setting up of the NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) group in Derry (initially called the Bridge Project) which works with prisoners and prisoners' families. They have also been involved in different aspects of liaison between the public and the police. They have been associated with the Northern Ireland Study Group whose aim is to stimulate political dialogue; people from the Centre have been involved in research on the causes of cultural division and a part-time researcher has been working on this area – her work will be published as a booklet. They also have a busy social welfare advice centre.

In their main office they have a book entitled "*Lest we forget*" which they compiled with the names of all the 258 people killed (correct to November 1986) in the recent troubles in the Derry and Strabane area, including army and UDR (Ulster Defence Regiment), police and civilians.

Dungannon (Co. Tyrone)

Dungannon Peace Group was a small group which has never formally disbanded although de facto it has ceased; nevertheless *Angela McAnespie* has continued to be involved and to be a member of the Peace People Executive. The group started during the rally phase; a rally in Dungannon in September 1976 had around 20,000 people at it and was attended by Betty Williams. A meeting following this, which was advertised locally, attracted just 12 or so people out of which 4 were really committed to working for the group.

The Dungannon Peace Group was involved in a number of activities, including selling '*Peace by Peace*' around houses and fundraising. They once organised a rock concert in the Royal School for young people from all around, and they also organised get-togethers for people who had gone to the Norwegian camps. Some of those involved had an ecumenical bent and worked away individually on this.

One interesting outcome from the Dungannon group was the setting up of a local Citizens Advice Bureau. The group did all the initial organising work, setting up the meeting, advertising it, and getting people down from Belfast to speak; the meeting then set up an independent management committee (including for a time *Angela McAnespie*) to run the Dungannon Citizens Advice Bureau which took off from there.

While the Dungannon Peace Group ceased to meet in 1985 following the departure of one of the group's stalwarts, Heidi Dugdale, from the area, the others still meet informally and, as already mentioned, *Angela McAnespie* is still very much involved in the Peace People.

Lower Falls (North West Belfast)

Following the rallies a local peace group was formed in the Lower Falls, in the area around the Sinn Fein headquarters. First of all they met in the convent, and subsequently in the monastery, prior to having their own office for a short while. They sold '*Peace by Peace*' around the area. *Eileen Toner* explained that everyone in the Peace People felt sorry for their group following the stoning of the marchers on the Falls Peace People rally, and as a result they were invited everywhere.

Eventually they got a room to use as an office in a house owned by a Catholic organisation. The intention was to use it for meetings and for adult education classes. However, following a meeting which they advertised locally attended by Betty and Mairead to which they felt they received a good response – they were asked to leave their office by the organisation which owned the property, because they felt the peace group was "too political". This kind of thing made it hard to keep going.

There was certainly indirect pressure on people not to be involved but certainly also no direct pressure from the Provos. Initially there had been 35 or so people involved after the rallies but this gradually dwindled down and with a lack of things to do the group eventually folded by 1979.

One interesting thing which some women involved did under the peace group's aegis was to negotiate between the army and local people on issues of contention. In one case when the army was holding a couple under house arrest the women managed to get in to talk to them, and to negotiate a settlement with the army. Coming outside again they told the people standing around to clear off and that there was going to be no trouble (there wasn't). Some people began to take their complaints regarding the army to the peace group.

Fermanagh

Most of the people who became involved in Fermanagh Peace Group were already involved in other voluntary work (a few were involved in PACE – Protestant and Catholic Encounter). 40 or 50 people came to the initial meeting but there was a hard core of 6 to 10 people, most of them outsiders to Fermanagh; typically there were 4 or 5 people at committee meetings.

However the group could see nothing specific for their work, no firm foundation to build on, and the distance between the different members (it is 14 miles from Kesh to Enniskillen for example) didn't help enthusiasm. The number of people was so small they felt that doing activities like fundraising took people away from other activities they were individually involved in and working with people.

After a while prayer had been included in the small regular meetings which took place; a couple of people who were interested in peace but not prayer used to leave before the prayers started. There was some limited contact with other groups, a couple of people going to visit people in Derry and Strabane and likewise a couple went to the Omagh rally, but nothing much came out of these contacts. Although there is a reference in the Peace People Trust minutes to the Trust offering to buy a 'peace house' for Enniskillen, neither *Gladys Thompson* nor Ann Barbour have any recollection of this, and both felt such a venture would have been totally beyond the small Fermanagh Peace Group.

Gladys Thompson did represent the group on the Executive for 18 months but by degrees came to feel that there wasn't much future in representing Fermanagh on it; the distance (over 80 miles from Belfast) was too far and the matters concerned weren't totally relevant. The group de-constituted itself at the end of 1979 and passed any money remaining and unsold copies of "Poems for Peace" which they'd been presented with to the headquarters. Gladys Thompson was pleased that they ceased to exist as a group a few months before the 1980 'split' as they didn't want to take sides in that.

Finaghy (South West Belfast)

The Finaghy group was formed following a visit by *Olive Miskelly* to the Peace People office at the top of Corrymeela House; she offered to help and was asked to start a local group. So she went around her friends and they got together and formed a group to go to the rallies. The incident which started the Peace People, the death of the Maguire children, happened locally, so that obviously affected people even more than else-where, and Betty Williams also lived locally.

The managed to get the use of a British Legion hall locally to hold their first major public meeting at which both Betty Williams and Olive Miskelly spoke; there were a couple of hundred people at this. During the rally phase they had a peace day at Finaghy with the signing of declarations et cetera, and the following night a candle lit vigil.

People who had previously tried to start a youth club locally had been turned down on the grounds that community relations were too good in the area! If there had been more rioting locally they might have succeeded. The peace group was offered a hut by the army for the purpose of having a youth club but they couldn't find a suitable site and the project foundered on this problem.

Although hundreds had signed the declaration at the peace day rally in Finaghy there were up to 20 - 26 people at discussion meetings which were held in different people's houses. While the group did do some things, such as fundraising for, and running, children's parties, the group was mainly a discussion 'one and some felt it was too intellectual. Olive Miskelly feels it would have needed someone strong enough to say 'come on' to people to galvanise them into action. The group lapsed into non-existence by the start of 1978.

One other incident which touched people very closely was the shooting dead of one of their members, in whose house peace group meetings had been held. He had heard screams in the office below where he worked in Belfast, went to help, and was shot dead by gunmen. The group ran a fund-raising dance for his widow (who was also involved in the group) and young children which raised several hundred pounds.

Hollywood (County Down)⁵⁶

Hollywood is one of the three surviving Peace People local groups; it has a couple of dozen members and 50 people in the area take *'Peace by Peace'*. As elsewhere, members are also heavily involved in other local activities. Hazel Senior explained how the Hollywood Peace Group is represented on the community council including a couple of their members who had been on its committee for years; she felt they were accepted and respected as a Peace People group (though occasionally people might mix them up with PACE – Protestant and Catholic Encounter – or certainly think of them in the same light).

Like Ballymena where all the hot internal Peace People issues were fully aired, Hazel Senior feels that the Hollywood group has always fully debated issues such as the H Blocks and the Emergency Provisions Act, getting down people like Tom Foley, Ciaran McKeown and Mairead Corrigan to discuss the issues with them. Again people did not always agree in the end of the day but the bulk of members were happy to remain as members.

A few did leave over the H Blocks policy of the Peace People. More recently a couple of people left over the coverage of nuclear disarmament in *'Peace by Peace'* as they felt it shouldn't be a concern of the Peace People; this is in a way an interesting comment on how some people define 'peace' in Northern Ireland. However Hazel commented that at the time of the 1980 'split' people decided that no matter what happened they would stay together – and so they have done.

The group had begun in the typical way of organising buses to go to the rallies in the autumn of 1976, a job which Hazel Senior found herself landed with. Anyway a small committee was formed from the people who went on the bus and they organised a rally in Hollywood on November 20th 1976.⁵⁷ This was attended by about 2,000 people including all the local clergy bar one. An early issue of *'Peace by Peace'* reported on the popularity in Hollywood of small groups meeting in houses rather than larger more general meetings *"in a town well supplied with plenty of mixed community facilities"*⁵⁸

The group has been involved in outings for mixed groups of pensioners and of children, the former from the Markets and Taughmonagh, the latter from Falls and Springfield, and outings also for prisoners' families. They have fundraised for different Peace People projects and for other charities. Their individual members have been heavily involved with many local organisations and projects. Four or five members have helped organise the postal distribution of *'Peace by Peace'* almost every issue since it began.

They still meet monthly as a group. They have had close contacts with the centre of the Peace People through the Seniors; Hazel Senior herself was chairperson of the Peace People Executive for two years to the autumn of 1986 and her husband Alan had been the Peace People's book-keeper for several years until shortly before his death at the end of August 1986 – as well as being involved in other aspects of Peace People work, including a number of years on the Executive.

Kilrea (Co. Derry)

The group in Kilrea had a dozen or so people actively involved including *Marion Lennox*. Most were also involved in other things. But in an area which had no common meeting place (the town hall had been destroyed 16 years ago) there was a conscious choice to use neutral territory for meetings, such as a hotel, and an underlying commitment to reconciliation and bringing people together – something which continued after the group was no longer connected with the Peace People.

But it was the Peace People experience which brought this group of people together. They would have had two or three dozen people attending particular functions they ran, and up to 50 or 80 for an Irish night. But while most people respected the Peace People they found the name was off-putting and inclined to turn people off rather than attract them, and they felt they weren't getting anywhere linked with the Peace People.

And so, through the common interest which the group had in the area and its local history, Kilrea Peace Group transmogrified (= magically transformed!) into Kilrea Local History Group. Among other work they have produced a very attractive book *"The fairy tham – gleanings and glimpses of old Kilrea"*.

Other activities continued which had begun during the time as a Peace People group, such as community carol singing at Christmas and social evenings. The reconciliation and bringing-people-together side of it remains a fairly important part for many of those involved, and the Kilrea Local History Group is accepted as a mixed group trying to bring people together, although this is a by-product of events which it organises.

⁵⁶ See profile of the group in *'Peace by Peace'* Vol. 5 No.11.

⁵⁷ *'Peace by Peace'*, Vol.1 No.4 p.11

⁵⁸ Vol.2 No.2 p.8

Lisburn (County Antrim)

The early Peace People presence in Lisburn was organised through the already existing Women Together group (which still continues today); they arranged buses to go to the rallies when around 80 or so people would have gone from the Lisburn area. The first large public meeting had been on 3rd November 1976 when Mairead Corrigan spoke, and this was followed by another discussion meeting after which 12 groups were formed to go out and knock on doors. A peace rally which was organised in Lisburn attracted 5,000 people. However its official beginning as a Peace People group only came on 1st February 1977.⁵⁹ The Peace People was seen as something larger than just Women Together, and there was also a small number of men interested (Women Together is, as the name suggests, a women only group).

I spoke to *four people* who were members of the extinct Peace People group in Lisburn. Some of these are still involved in Women Together and one thing which they felt was good about the latter and helped prevent power struggles was the way the office bearers in the Lisburn group changed every year. A few people also became involved in the Peace People group who had been involved in PACE (Protestant and Catholic Encounter).

The Lisburn group did all the usual things such as selling '*Peace by Peace*' but the major project they attempted was setting up a community drop-in centre for young people and others. However they had to make a planning application for change of use regarding the premises they had in mind in Conway Street (which the Peace People Charitable Trust would have purchased for them). However their planning application failed – partly perhaps due to politically-motivated objections being made by people – but in any case that was the end of that.

The most dynamic time for the group, and perhaps the only time they were involved in what might be labelled direct action, was during the loyalist strike of May 1977. This was a fairly open ended strike but the aim of the organisers was to paralyse normal life; 20 or so members of the Lisburn group were involved in staying on the streets around shops which were liable to be intimidated into closing, and in a couple of cases they actually sat outside a couple of shops (with the support of the shopkeepers). However while they may have had some success in preventing intimidation in the short term (and their very presence when the UDA came around asking shopkeepers to close obviously lent support to those who didn't want to close), one of the shops they sat outside had its windows smashed after the members of the peace group had gone home. This is indicative of the difficulty of any anti-intimidatory action in Northern Ireland – it has to be for 24 hours a day.

But many members of the group were becoming disillusioned with what was happening in the Peace People, and some started to drift off. The final straw came with the 'split' of 1980 which involved most closely a member of the Lisburn group – Peter McLachlan. Some representatives did go to the Newry consultative board meeting following the 'split' at the centre but found it tense and totally divisive.

There were just 5 or so people at the final meeting of the Lisburn Peace Group which decided to close itself down. However some people came into the Women Together group through the Peace People, and this continues to be very active today; the feeling was that the quality of membership benefited greatly from this influx of Peace People blood.

Malone (South Belfast)

The Malone area is the archetypal and even in popular thinking sometimes the stereotypical upper-middle class area of Belfast and indeed Northern Ireland. The group came together during the rally phase; *Paul McRandal* (who along with his wife Sheelagh were two of the moving forces behind the group) estimated there would have been a core membership of 25 - 30, though many more than that would have come to functions. Over a hundred people attended an open meeting of the group in January 1977 when a committee of 15 were elected and some policies for the group were agreed.⁶⁰

The problem for the Malone group was that they had plenty of people willing to do things but what were they to do? In such an area there was no immediate physical violence. The policy agreed in January 1977 included the following two points:

1. *It is important that the group works for peace in its own area, by overcoming apathy and bigotry, and by encouraging and supporting those in less fortunate districts. This latter must be done with great tact.*
2. *As the Malone area has many professional resources, it is to establish a panel of advisers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers, architects, etc., who will give specialised assistance to other peace groups as and when requested."*

⁵⁹ See '*Peace by Peace*', Vol.1 No.3 p.18 and Vol.2 No.2 p.5.

⁶⁰ '*Peace by Peace*', Vol.2 No.1.

This was perhaps generous thinking but nothing much came of it presumably because other groups in other areas felt they had to solve their own problems and that calling for help from the Malone group would have been beneath their dignity, however tactfully that help was offered. While this did not succeed, Malone organised barn dances and other social functions and fundraising ventures to which they invited other people and this did help mixing among different groups.

Kathleen Fleming organised an art competition on a peace theme for the different schools in the area on behalf of the group, though some schools refused to join in. Kathleen Fleming considered Malone to be a difficult area in which to work. Knocking on doors there was considered an intrusion of privacy by people who, whether concerned or annoyed by the violence in other parts of the city, for the most part were unaffected personally. She felt that changing attitudes anywhere is very difficult. However it was possible to encourage some to work for peace on an individual basis and therefore had to be attempted.

However quite quickly some members became disenchanted with the Peace People. Paul McRandal identifies this disintegration as happening when the Peace People moved from the strict path of looking for peace in Northern Ireland to other concerns such as the third world. Many members felt that there were problems in Northern Ireland which had to be sorted out before they tried to sort out other people's problems. Others also felt that if they wanted to be involved with third world issues they'd get involved with Oxfam etc. rather than the Peace People which they joined because of its concern with Northern Ireland.

Paul McRandal also felt the movement became politically oriented and was ill-equipped to deal with issues like emergency legislation; he feels a sense of ineffectiveness took over and people gradually drifted away. In any case the Malone group was extinct within a couple of years of its being started. Paul McRandal feels that those who had been actively involved in the community prior to the peace group continued their involvement elsewhere and that those who joined as a once-off activity dropped out. Kathleen Fleming, who had begun work with a group in the neighbouring working class area of Taughmonagh (see entry) from her base in the Malone group continued her involvement in the Peace People until just before the 1980 'split'.

Mountpleasant (North Belfast)

Mountpleasant is a fairly small private estate of 5 streets off Belfast's North Circular Road; the group was initially called Duncoole after a street name within the estate. After the Derry rally, *Pat Johnston* and a few others got together and held an initial meeting which was attended by 40 or 50 people, half of them men.

In their search to see what they could do locally, they focussed on young people around the area with nothing to do. Regarding premises they sought the use of an old farmhouse in the middle of the estate which had been bought by the Catholic Church to use for mass on Sundays. A free children's party was held but some Protestants in this majority Protestant area objected to events being held in a Catholic-owned premises, despite the farmhouse having no symbols or signs associated with its owners.

One local man did a lot of work to get a youth club going in the farmhouse under the auspices of the peace group. However in response to local apprehensions a meeting was held in neutral territory to discuss the concern held by some Protestants about the use of the Catholic-owned farmhouse, and despite everything that the group did being mixed. *Pat and Joe Johnston* recall how a respected member of the community called them 'troublemakers', which they felt was middle-class bigotry coming through (the same person had tried to oppose the farmhouse being used for mass).

But the group persevered and took care to talk to people possibly affected, and the youth club went ahead, with even some young people coming from the neighbouring Silverstream area. However as the youth club continued, and people from the peace group were involved in that, the peace group itself ceased to meet and disintegrated.

Pat Johnston had been convenor of meetings of the peace group and she recalls that as she became more involved at Fredheim she had less time to be involved locally, and no one else took over convening meetings. It did last longer, however, than the neighbouring Cavehill Road group, with which it had been in contact. It had also been in contact with the Ballygomartin group, which had Tilly Lindsay involved, and this continued longer still.

The youth club went well for about a year and a half until, around the 12th July 1978, the farmhouse was burnt down in a deliberate sectarian attack which not only removed from the face of the earth a place where Catholics went to mass but simultaneously obliterated the meeting place for the local youth club and it, too, had to fold up.

Newry (County Down)

The big start to the Peace People story in Newry came with a rally on 18th September 1977, with people coming from all over. A report in *'Peace by Peace'* estimated 28,000 people taking part though it may have been somewhat smaller.⁶¹ The IRA evidently showed their distaste by blowing up a petrol tanker at the nearby customs post during the ecumenical prayer service at the rally.⁶²

A group was set up in Newry and also in various towns and villages around South Down and South Armagh. In March 1977 *"a formal Peace Committee was formed in Newry to act as an umbrella for the outlying groups"* with a concentration on community and social service. However this must have lapsed quite fast because when *Sean Heaney* became involved in late 1977 it was in a newly reconstituted group which had been formed at the instigation of Fredheim; at this stage it was a matter of trying to re-contact people who had been on the rallies. Many people had gone from Newry to other rallies in a bus organised by the Warrenpoint group.

The new group had a core of about 10 including Quakers, Church of Ireland members and Catholics. The group was not an 'action' group, its members were all very active in other things including work with handicapped children and involvement in the charismatic renewal movement. Occasionally they went to UDR (Ulster Defence Regiment) or police funerals, or visited the homes of people bereaved in the troubles. Its value was in the forum for interaction with people of different denominations and discussion regarding the troubles which it provided. Exchanges also took place with Waterford Peace Group in the Republic and with Killinchy Peace Group (County Down), the latter being mainly members of the Presbyterian Church.

Although the group formally disbanded in 1985 following the departure of one couple and the increasing irregularity of meetings, people have occasionally come together since then, and Sean Heaney was on the Peace People Executive until October 1986; Sean was also involved in the initial stage of setting up a Pax Christi group in Newry which continues to flourish.

Sean Heaney's comments on the group included; *"We didn't have enough small projects on hand to make the group effective either in affecting the scene outside or drawing in new members. We were too cosy as a group, enjoying each other's company; a good object in itself but not a sufficient object for a peace group"*.

North Circular(North Belfast)

Early on *Bill Mitchell* had Mairead Corrigan and Ciaran McKeown at his home and invited a dozen local people he knew had been on the marches. From this they decided to organise a local church service for peace, and people were asked at this if they were interested in doing something practical for peace.

Around 40 people turned up to a meeting, and Bill Mitchell tried to get people to form half a dozen small sub-groups with different emphases. One of these, the 'Peace through education' sub-group never got very far, though Bill Mitchell himself followed up this line of interest and wrote a book on peace education.⁶³

The only successful strand in this, however, in terms of continuity was the 'Peace through fellowship' bible study group which *Lois MacPherson* co-ordinated; this bible study group continues today with 12 – 16 people at meetings although there are no longer connections with the Peace People.

There was also an interesting spin-off from the 'Peace through fellowship' group in a monthly fast, initiated by Aidan O'Neill, which brought more people in and usually has a speaker on a third world topic and money raised for third world projects. People fast from 8pm one day through to 8pm the following when they break their fast with soup and rolls at the meeting. attended by anything from a dozen to forty people. This is also totally independent of the Peace People.

The North Circular Peace Group as such met once a month, often with outside speakers, but Lois MacPherson found that with the trouble of the 'split' in 1980 people couldn't be raised to be interested in meetings and as such it is extinct, although the spin-offs of the bible study and fast groups are very much alive.

One interesting personal reflection from Lois MacPherson about all this was that she felt for the first time she was enabled to relate to Catholics at a deeper level and the ability to recognise differences where they existed, as well as being able to talk with people locally about major issues that might previously have gone undiscussed.

⁶¹ 'Peace by Peace' Vol.2 No.2 p.8

⁶² Deutsch p.96

⁶³ "Education for Peace" by W.R. Mitchell, Christian Journals Ltd., 1978, 64 pages.

Rathcoole (North Belfast)

Although there is no longer a peace group in Rathcoole, a sprawling loyalist working class housing estate in North Belfast, there is still contact with the Peace People through the continued involvement of *Freda Lyness* and *Rhoda Watson*. Originally people who had been on the first few rallies got together and decided to go to Derry; Nancy McDonald, who became the early leader of the group, suggested a bus and in fact two bus loads went from Rathcoole. The involvement from Rathcoole was entirely women.

Meetings took place every week, in Nancy McDonald's house. However a split developed within a year, partly over personality problems, after a reunion meeting was held for the 15 women who had been on a trip to Germany; only those who had been to Germany were invited and this was interpreted by others as a secret meeting, and some people dropped out.

Subsequently Freda Lyness took over the leadership in terms of organising the meetings in her house; originally there was around 30 people at meetings, following the group's split in 1977 there would have been the 15 who went to Germany.

The group had a lot of contact with other groups, including Bawnmore (the nearest Catholic estate), Cloughfern, and others. Fundraising events were held for various causes, including for children going camping and for a local playgroup. There was also contact with the local 'community' police.

There was also a Youth for Peace group locally which had a couple of members of the adult peace group involved in its committee. The most interesting of Rathcoole Peace Group's involvements came through a project which Youth for Peace initiated to turn some empty flats into a drop-in centre, a project which would also provide space for games, boxing and mothers and toddlers. An independent committee was formed to pursue this project which included some men with paramilitary connections, although wearing a different hat in this case, who were antagonistic to the Peace People; the suggestion was even made that the Peace People should go to the Falls Road where they were needed! However despite the project getting as far as having had architects' plans drawn up it eventually fell through.

Rathcoole Peace Group itself fizzled out during 1978; when Freda Lyness stopped organising meetings no one else took it on. However Freda Lyness and Rhoda Watson have continued involvement in Funline, in the Junior Football League of the past, and in general Peace People affairs.

Greater Shankill (North West Belfast)

The Greater Shankill is a substantial size incorporating a number of different areas, basically all of Protestant North West Belfast. The involvement in the Peace People experience from here was almost entirely during the rally phase but was very substantial in terms of numbers; *Sandy Woods* recalls that a dozen coaches and a few double-decker buses took people from the Greater Shankill area to the Derry rally – perhaps some 800 people. *Walter Lewis*, then Church of Ireland minister at St Andrews in Glencairn at the top of the Shankill, estimates that upwards of 300 people from Glencairn went on the rallies – out of a total population of 4½ thousand in this totally Protestant estate.

As to why the people of the Shankill came out in such numbers, much of it was certainly identification by women with what happened to the Maguire family, and those who came from the Shankill were almost entirely women. There was also an inherent expression of solidarity with Catholics who seemed to be standing up against the IRA and violence in their areas, but those I talked to felt the people who went to the rallies from the Shankill were also very definitely taking a stand against violence in Protestant areas and by loyalist paramilitaries.

However, people became disillusioned even faster than else-where, and with the possible exception of the Ballygomartin group (associated with Tilly Lindsay), again at the top of the Greater Shankill area, there were no formal group structures set up. Walter Lewis feels the leadership failed to provide the machinery for structuring that mass of enthusiasm. He was involved in organising one of the four or so public meetings in the Greater Shankill area, in his church in the autumn of 1976. This was attended by a couple of the leaders but nothing came of it and there was no move to incorporate the local voice into the Peace People. The response from the then leadership would certainly be that they had neither the time nor the resources in terms of the right people to help but the question remains as to whether the leaders' time was allocated in the best possible manner.

In the lower Shankill, *Winnie Nelson* had become involved at the beginning and travelled to the different rallies and even went to Germany with Betty Williams. But by October she had cut her direct links to the Peace People though continued her local involvement in personal and other advice work on a one-to-one basis to people who came looking for help. The first disillusionment for her was during the meeting in Agnes Street Methodist Hall when there was a clash between Ciaran

McKeown and the women from the Shankill as to who was going to issue a statement from the meeting – Ciaran or them. Sandy Woods agrees on this point and felt a big amount of support on the Shankill was lost over this incident.

Winnie Nelson was further disillusioned by other statements from the leadership, including promises from Betty Williams that she would get a community centre built here or a factory built there. Winnie did however retain for some time personal links with Peace People people such as the Holywood group or with Pat Hale of the Woodbreda group, the former providing an outing for mothers and children and the latter roses and flowers for sheltered dwellings for old people.

Winnie Nelson instanced one example of cross-community support in the early rally days. A woman who lived in the flat below her on the lower Shankill had been going to the rallies and as a result had the doors and staircase in her flat covered in paint; one Catholic woman walked all the way from Andersonstown to help this Protestant woman clean up the mess. Winnie Nelson herself was intimidated and threatened but feels that eventually people came to accept her for what she was.

The only time nonviolent direct action was utilised in the area by the Peace People was within a short while of the Shankill Road rally. A bus had been burnt and set alight outside a doctor's surgery. A group of women blocked the road and refused to allow any traffic through in protest, a spontaneous act which received a hostile response from the black taxi drivers who couldn't get through (the buses having been taken off the road with the trouble that day, the black taxis would have been a large proportion of the traffic up and down the Shankill); one taxi tried to run down one of the women. The women continued their protest at what they regarded as this dangerous violence of the bus hijacking and burning for a couple of hours. The road was back to normal the next day.

But there were a number of factors which contributed to the Peace People experience on the Shankill being such a short one. Certainly the statements from the leadership criticising the security forces over particular instances did not endear the Peace People to local people though a couple of those I spoke to felt this could have been forgiven if people from the area had been brought in and involved.

Sandy Woods explained this problem using a business term; the 'middle management' – those involved in a leadership role at a local level – were receiving plenty of flak for statements made by the leadership but they knew nothing more about the reasons for these statements and decisions than anyone else. These 'middle management' people were put in a position where they couldn't answer the criticisms levelled at them by people locally because they didn't have the information to do so, and this put them in an impossible position. The response generally was to opt out of involvement in the Peace People.

But to add insult to injury three Protestant leaders (Peter McLachlan, Pat Knox, Pat Morrow) were added to the initial three Catholic leaders without including anyone from such a major working class Protestant area (and major source of rally participants) as the Greater Shankill. It was not criticism of the individual new Protestant leaders as they were generally respected by those who knew them within the Peace People but of the fact that three middle class Protestants were chosen who could not be seen to speak for such a working class area. Such a formidable local person as Saidie Patterson, involved in helping set up the Shankill rally, was also seen as being brushed aside.

There was a certain achievement in the few months of the Peace People on the Shankill. Walter Lewis spoke of a new hope and a new confidence in standing up to violence. He feels the Peace People experience was an important impetus in furthering community development in Glencairn anyhow, that new people were turned in this direction. The church he worked for received a new influx of people into youth work through the Peace People, i.e. through people locally being motivated. This was part of the development of a community response to violence and other local problems which provided the people power base for setting up a co-op to take over the local supermarket in Glencairn when it was closing in 1980.

But while people may have been thrown into community work through the experience, the Peace People presence in the Greater Shankill – with the exception of the group in Ballygomartin which continued until 1978 – was finished by Christmas 1976 if even not a month or two earlier. The Peace People development team did subsequently do 'cold start' canvassing in the upper Shankill to try to get a group going; there was some favourable doorstep response but it didn't translate into people willing to become actively involved. The Peace People experience, as 'Peace People', had come and gone in three or four months.

Saintfield Road (South Belfast)

The Saintfield Road group began at the rally stage. Saintfield Road is a main artery out the south side of Belfast and the Saintfield Road group is not to be confused with a group which also existed in Saintfield village. The first meeting was held in Pearl Walker's house.

One interesting early meeting was with Betty Williams which Pearl Walker had organised using Saintfield Road Presbyterian Church hall as a venue; 300 people turned up, and as fortune or misfortune would have it there was a church session meeting in progress simultaneously. The group's request for additional chairs to try to seat the 300 was discussed at the session meeting and some members of the church were sufficiently hardline to object to Betty Williams' very presence at a meeting in their church hall and they left the church for years over this very matter.

However, partly through the wife of a Church of Ireland rector being involved, they were able to use Knockbreda parish church hall for some time. Initially there had been 60 members of the group, though this dwindled down to just 5 or so active when the group de-constituted itself in 1980 after the 'split'. The people I talked to, *Barbara Armstrong*, *Wilma McGonigle*, and *Pat Hale* attributed the decline in the group to a variety of factors including bad communication and the problems which headlines over the H Blocks and the like caused for them.

In terms of its work people were involved in selling 'Peace by Peace', participating in flying squads, and some were also involved in Fredheim including cleaning the house there. The most interesting project they became involved with was principally work with old people in the Silvertops community centre in the Markets (a Catholic working class area at the bottom of the Ormeau Road); quite literally some of the members of the Saintfield Road group called in there and said "Hello, we're a group of Prods from the top of the Ormeau Road" and took it from there, being involved in helping running a variety of things for the old people.

This had come about through a suggestion of Peter McLachlan's as the group was looking for something more interesting to do. Subsequently Silvertops was (deliberately) burnt down and that was the end of that for the Saintfield Road group although they kept in touch with local residents.

When the time came those remaining in the Saintfield Road group wrote what they considered a very polite letter to the Peace People saying that the group was being disbanded but they would continue working for peace. A couple of people continued their involvement in Lifeline which had begun within the Peace People umbrella.

A comment from Wilma McGonigle about working in a middle class area such as this is worth passing on; "*I would rather have knocked on some of the doors on the Falls or the Shankill than knocked on some of the doors up beside me. Because they were sitting in a nice wee community, with the attitude "I don't want to know", and that apathy was a harder thing to break through.*"

Suffolk (West Belfast)

In the early days there were actually two Suffolk groups. The upper Suffolk group was comprised principally of women who had been involved in Women Together and after the rally phase it continued as a Women Together group. The second group, which lasted as a Peace People group until 1979, was organised by *Sadie Johnston* at the end of the rally phase; Sadie herself lived on the borderline between Suffolk and Andersonstown and early on she was actually involved in helping both the Suffolk and Andersonstown groups.

A bus load of people went from Suffolk to the early rallies, but as time went by fewer people went, and they used some money which they had been given from Darlington in England to subsidise the buses. If people got separated from the Suffolk group at the rallies they might have joined in with the neighbouring groups of Andersonstown or Ladybrook.

Following the rally phase the Suffolk group was quite a small one of 6 – 8 women who were dependent on Sadie Johnston to organise the meetings; she tried to get someone else to take it on but no one was willing. The group met once a week in the early days and once a month later on; they were also involved in selling 'Peace by Peace'.

There was considerable discussion regarding what was happening in the Peace People, with some differences of opinion; Sadie Johnston found it difficult to try to keep people in touch with what was happening at Fredheim and there was a difficulty too with people either not driving or having transport. They were only in Fredheim once as a group when Betty Williams had asked them to clean a house which she had acquired for Anne Maguire coming back from New Zealand (though as it turned out she didn't want to live in it) and they went to the Peace House following their work.

When Sadie Johnston no longer organised meetings, due to her commitment to other Peace People activities including the Executive and the group development team, the Suffolk group went out of existence.

Sydenham

The Sydenham group was begun by *Isobel Bennett* and Eleanor Leeman; they printed leaflets to call a peace meeting in Sydenham.⁶⁴ Isobel Bennett explained that for weeks before she had seen Mairead Corrigan on television the feeling among many people was that they had to do something about the violence. Anyway, 50 people turned up at the first Sydenham meeting. But what should they do and how did you run a peace meeting? Isobel recalls being applauded as she read out cuttings from the paper about Mairead and Betty and the Peace People!

The Sydenham group went to all the rallies but for months had no contact with the Peace People office as they didn't know it existed. They met many different groups and people going to the Derry rally as their bus broke down on the Glenshane Pass and everybody stopped, and a few people from the Sydenham bus were put onto each of the other buses until everyone was taken care of. Isobel asked Sydenham people to walk behind the banners of groups from Catholic areas.

The Sydenham group hired a local hall for a once a month meeting, and one night they had up to 90 people at it. Knocknagoney, Belmont and Sydenham groups also helped to organise a rally in the Victoria Park as they did not regard the Ormeau Park rally as being sufficiently into East Belfast to suffice. Of the 40 or so people involved in the Sydenham group, Isobel estimated that only a quarter had been involved in things before; most still remain involved in different voluntary activities today including work with the aged, in youth clubs, children's homes and for the mentally ill.

Regarding a project they were looking to see what they should do and hit on the idea of working to get a battered women's hostel in East Belfast, since different groups were picking up on different aspects of violence. Gradually they felt their way on this, fundraising and learning as they went.

Eventually a hostel was set up as a joint project between local people and Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society (now Bryson House); the hostel still operates successfully today. It always operated as an independent project since many of those involved initially saw their task as working as a pressure group to get a hostel opened and did not continue when premises were actually purchased (initially they rented one house, then purchased next door, and finally bought out the rented property; the houses are joined at two levels). This hostel is also independent of Women's Aid since there were some policy differences regarding, for example, the presence of men – unlike Women's Aid they permitted women to meet their husbands in the hostel.

The Sydenham group had contact with other East Belfast groups, such as Belmont, Knocknagoney and Newtownards Road at a monthly East Belfast meeting. However policies were emerging which the Sydenham group found unacceptable; half a dozen people from the area were involved in Lifeline and they obviously felt the way Lifeline was treated was unfair (as well as Lifeline some members were involved in prison visiting). There was also the feeling that the Peace People policy on the H Blocks was too political, and that the leadership wasn't listening to the ordinary members. The group disaffiliated from the Peace People in 1979 and changed its name to Sydenham Community Group; they continued meeting regularly until 1981 and now remain as an informal network that can be called into operation as need be.

Perhaps the most dramatic moment for those involved came when some women members of East Belfast groups were involved in a counter-march to the 1977 loyalist strike; they marched to Ian Paisley's house to urge him to get people off the streets and to say they would hold Paisley responsible if anyone was killed. Some of them ended up working, through Lifeline, with the widow of a bus driver who was killed during the strike.

Taughmonagh (South Belfast)

Taughmonagh is a strongly loyalist working class estate in South Belfast which borders with the Malone area. In 'Peace by Peace' the presence of observers at the Killyhevlin convention of April 1977 from this area is listed under "Toughmonagh".⁶⁵ Many of the women rejected the influence of the local paramilitaries and because of this, approached the Malone group who responded. *Kathleen Fleming* evolved as the person who became involved.

The main source of social provision at that time in the area was a working men's club. Kathleen Fleming responded to the women's request to provide alternative resources with membership open to the whole community. And so they started a pensioners club, a social club, a lunch club, and a youth club which Kathleen ran herself for 7 years. The pensioners club had links with other areas, e.g. the (Catholic) Markets, but the youth club didn't mix much. They received several small grants from Germany and German youth who understood the significance of what they were providing.

⁶⁴ See profile of Sydenham Peace Group by Norman Lockhart in 'Peace by Peace' Vol.1 No.3 November 19th 1976.

⁶⁵ 'Peace by Peace' Vol. 2 No.2.

While Kathleen Fleming resigned quietly from the Peace People Executive (of which she was vice-chair) some months before the 'split' of 1980, she encouraged the Taughmonagh group to continue its involvement in the Peace People (though this didn't happen). She and some of the women continued to be involved locally for some time afterwards.

The prefabricated buildings which they used were eventually burnt down and are no longer there but the pensioners and lunch clubs they began continue on. The youth club closed when Kathleen Fleming no longer had the time to be involved. She believes this has been for the good as a very successful youth club has now been established by the local Presbyterian minister.

As in some other working class areas it took much courage for women to stand up and be counted, but they did. Just as the Shankill and Falls marches had a much wider significance than being solely pro-peace, anti-violence marches (and different significance for different people, but that is beside the point here), so the low-key work in Taughmonagh was more significant in the prevailing climate. It is important to assess such work in the context in which it existed.

Whitewell (North Belfast)

This area of North Belfast, bounded by the Antrim and Whitewell roads, is mixed by both religion and class. The group started quite quickly after the second or third rally when a couple of women got together to knock on doors enquiring if people wanted to go to the rallies. *Martin O'Brien* identified the group as having been particularly strong during the rally phase and somewhat smaller, with 20 - 25 people at meetings, thereafter.

Unlike some other areas even the people who became the key organisers for the Whitewell group had not been involved in community or voluntary activities before; any difficulty due to this was overcome through experience. *Martin O'Brien* felt that the main problem the group faced was dependence on a few key people. What the group should get involved in was also a difficult question for them; they did organise Christmas parties, a fireworks display, and such events which brought people together.

But there was a major project which was attempted – setting up a community centre. At that stage, 1976 - 77, there were no facilities for meetings and for voluntary groups and young people to use; having put considerable thought into the commitment required they managed to identify a property and applied to the Peace People Charitable Trust for a loan to purchase it. However due to a slip up in the processing of their application the money wasn't approved until it was too late to acquire the property in question.

Some people were rather disgruntled that they had missed the boat, and as it happened suitable property in the area was difficult to come by and no other 'boat' came along. *Martin O'Brien* feels that if this project had come through the commitment necessary would have kept the group together, though equally, as elsewhere, the project could have continued while the group (as a Peace People group) went into abeyance.

During the May 1977 loyalist strike the group was on the streets, like the group in Lisburn, in trying to support shop-keepers who wanted to stay open, and trying to help people who wanted to get to work or school to get there (e.g. by going to the bus stops to prevent intimidation there, or by arranging alternative transportation). A meeting had been previously held to discuss what action the group would take in the situation existing of fear and tension, and they had decided to go on the streets.

The group was also involved in selling '*Peace by Peace*', some 120 copies a fortnight in the early days, and to a small degree in work with old people and prison visiting. But gradually people began to drift away although *Martin O'Brien* feels with no sense of animosity – and that many former members locally can still be called on for help. The group wasn't affected by the 1980 'split' but what did affect it shortly afterwards was the departure of two key people from the area.

So the group as a group perhaps operated from 1976 - 1981, after that there were still 4 or 5 people locally involved in Peace People activities who would have helped out with things happening in or organised by the people in Rathcoole, Whiteabbey, Cloughfern, or Greenisland groups – at this stage with the diminution of numbers it was like a wider Newtownabbey group. And there are still individual members involved in some of these areas.

Woodbreda (South Belfast)

The Woodbreda group was a small, positive development from the Saintfield Road group and it existed for a year from 1977 - 78. It was formed by *Pat Hale* because she felt the Saintfield Road group was too big and there was a need to get even more local than that, and *Ciaran* and *Mairead* had been emphasising work street by street; there was also the opportunity to get some of her neighbours involved who would not have gone to the Saintfield Road group meetings.

The Woodbreda group had 6 or 7 people involved, 'professional' people, and they took on a new project each month. One project was helping an NSPCC playgroup in University Street. Another project which took up a large amount of time was trying to get a local school open for various community activities; as they surmounted each new barrier put up by the headmaster, including the caretaking difficulty of having the school open outside normal school hours (the group organised a rota of parents who were prepared to undertake caretaking duties), a new difficulty was put in their path. The school opposite and across the Saint-field Road (being very busy with traffic this made it difficult for children to get at for activities) was open for all sorts of community activities. However the insurmountable obstacle for the group proved to be a fire clause which they could do nothing about and they had to admit defeat.

The last project which the group undertook was taking out a group of old people from the New Lodge and Shankill to Lady Dixon Park where they could choose roses for their gardens or old people's homes, and for a meal laid on by Lambeg Presbyterian Church. Pat Hale said the effect on the old people, their joy at the care and attention shown to them, was partly instrumental in her becoming involved in the welfare side of the Peace People's work, and subsequently a full-time 'part-time' welfare worker.

However, so far as the Woodbreda group was concerned it was the end. Some people had moved out of the area, and others felt that one year was long enough to give up to work for peace. And it does seem they worked hard – Pat Hale herself said she only realised afterwards how hard she had pushed people.

Chapter 4: Interviews

The interviews in this section were done in the period Autumn 1985 - Summer 1986. With the exception of the Derry interview they usually followed a lengthier background interview, and were intended to be 'verbatim' interviews. Those interviewed had the opportunity to check the transcript of their own interview, and in some cases they have made some fairly small amendments as well as some grammatical tidying up; by and large they have been left in colloquial rather than written style. Mairead Maguire made some written additions and alterations to her original interview.

Ciaran McKeown

Ciaran McKeown was certainly one of the most controversial figures in the earlier story of the Peace People. He effectively gave up a successful career in journalism when he threw him-self into the Peace People; he now works as a typesetter.

Rob: Some people have portrayed you as the Machiavelli in the whole ball game, in other words implying that you were someone behind the scenes manipulating things. How do you react to that sort of portrayal?

Ciaran: Yes, I can understand that impression and I think there is some truth in it. I certainly felt it was my responsibility to bring whatever intelligence and experience I had to work. The intelligent organisation of events can be seen as Machiavellian manipulation. And very often the implying of manipulation came from people who wished to manipulate in a different direction.

Rob: But also part of it may have been that you were perhaps clearer than a lot of other people where you wanted to go and your line was coming across perhaps more persistently.

Ciaran: Yes, I think that's exactly what happened. I had a much clearer idea where I thought we should go. For a start I set things up in that way and therefore responsible for the failures. Therefore my personality did come across because I spent a great deal of time trying to persuade people and my view prevailed very often. And people thought I was dictating; I was called not only a Machiavelli, I was called a dictator, and I must have come across as that to people. I was also called a dreamer which isn't exactly consistent with being a dictator. There are elements of truth in both words, it's difficult for me to judge when I was frightening people by seeming to be a pie-in-the-sky dreamer or frightening them because I seemed to be a power-oriented dictatorial Machiavelli.

Rob: Some of the key phrases associated with Peace People policy – words such as community politics, a common Northern Ireland identity, emergency status in relation to H Blocks – came from you. On these important aspects of Peace People policy do you think you pushed things too hard where people weren't able to get to grips with them and understand them in the time allowed to them?

Ciaran: If the thing were a church or a nonviolent study group the charge would be absolutely correct. There is no doubt about it that the timing and the pushing of certain issues was too difficult for many people. But on the other hand one tried to ensure there was plenty for these people to do, there was room in the Peace People for everybody. If somebody found the H Blocks far too difficult to stomach, understand, or do anything about then there were plenty of other areas of work in which they could be engaged and leave that to people who felt moved about it. The mentality that people had of political parties that they have to either give assent to the vote or not give assent to the vote was something we tried to avoid.

The other very important aspect of this was that whether members of the Peace People were comfortable or not there were events outside the Peace People which could reduce to nought the progress which I felt had been made between 1976 and 1978. And that therefore it would nearly be better to risk the demise of the Peace People to ensure that the polarisation implicit in the events emerging from the Emergency Provisions Act and from the prisons – if the possibilities inherent in that situation were not defused and diffused it would be the pure luxury of people scratching their nonviolent consciences on an irrelevant mountainside if we didn't tackle them. Therefore I was constantly caught between these two, things – the need to help people understand why the thing was important and not something you could ignore, and on the other hand whether they understood it or not we were involved in that battle.

It's one of the great dilemmas for anyone who would assume a position of leadership in nonviolence; you embark upon situations sometimes in which lives are at risk and you take responsibility for that. The more so if you feel some of those are going along because they trust you and haven't fully conscientiously understood why. A very simple example of that would be the Falls rally where someone could have been killed, dozens could have been killed. You take responsibility for that, and it's a very dangerous thing because you're not only risking lives but you're also risking a reversal.

You're trying to get people to live with insecurity rather than protect themselves and the danger if you push people beyond their own fear tolerance you run the risk of reverting to an extremely primitive form of us and them – the goodies versus the baddies and the baddies should be shot or locked up or something like that. It's a very tricky thing and I don't think there's any easy answer to it. There isn't an easy answer to it. The only thing the individual leader can do is become much more sensitive, much more deeply in control of his self or her self, and as sensitive as he can possibly be to where people are at. In fact we did try that but we weren't adequate to it obviously.

Rob: Concerning the whole Peace People structure as it was built, as an alternative to parliamentary style politics which don't exist in Northern Ireland anyway in any meaningful fashion; the internal Peace People politics seemed to be parliamentary style, minority/majority, people trying to get their policies through, all that sort of thing. So there wasn't so much of the consensus style.

Ciaran: It may have looked like that but in fact the original plan was that each group should have numbers of delegates proportional to their numbers, to the Assembly. But built into that was the autonomy of the groups. Now people again carried into the Peace People the habits of political parties or trade unions and it was very hard to get people to realise – look, if the Assembly votes for something that is not obligatory for a group.

Rob: But that's meaningless to a local group if they're associated thereby with it.

Ciaran: No, they'd be perfectly entitled to put out a statement saying they didn't agree. Some occasionally did but they tended to do it by the back door by slipping titbits to particular journalists.

Rob: But there are limits to how long a group could continue doing this.

Ciaran: Yes if it was a matter of conscience but it usually wasn't. The basic structure was severely damaged at the April 1977 meeting by the move from certain people to limit the delegations from each group to two. So there were groups of two literally with a delegation of two and groups of twenty with a delegation of two, which was absurd. And the people who tended to be groups of two tended to be the most useless, if I could put it as strongly as that, people who spent their time plotting but who would not organise a group or go out into the community at all, and were forever worried about what are the leaders saying. They were completely taken up with this.

Rob: You feel this unfairly biased the whole movement.

Ciaran: Yes, I think it was a disaster from the point of view of presenting it as an alternative model. The consequences were very great. But then perhaps we were trying to do too much all at once. There was only just the one opportunity to try everything so what could we do only try it. They certainly were parliamentary and democratic for all the talk about dictators and Machiavellis; there was endless discussion.

Sometimes the proof that I was a dictator was that I would go out to a meeting knowing what I wanted and come out the other end with it. Now if I was a dictator there wouldn't have been eight hours of discussion. There was tremendous discussion even of quite small things. And an awful lot of the people who were involved had never heard of minutes and chairmen and treasurers and all that sort of stuff, and were very inhibited. So it was a learning experience of the most primitive kind in public business for many people, and those who were experienced took it for granted. Wittingly or unwittingly I may have been a Machiavelli.

Rob: What positive things do you think came out of the Peace People?

Ciaran: Well before I answer that let me say I just do not know and I don't think anyone can know in this life whether the account book, as it were, balances between the failure and the hopes we raised, because there's no doubt about the hope we raised and hope is a very important thing to raise. If you disappoint the hopes though the despair can be proportionate, so trying to tell in fact whether there would be a redemption from that despair.

In the shorter term it would be possible to point to very considerable goods, there are people walking about live who would not have been by now, and by that I mean very specific cases. The passion for violence was considerably neutralised, the rate of violence dropped and has never recovered apart from one blimp over the H Block issue. Whether that's coincidental, that it was going to happen anyway, or due to the Peace People is an impossible question. I think it provided a public move of consciousness or position which allowed the reflex in the course of violence to diminish very very considerably.

I think it changed the lives of quite a number of people. It gave the ideas of nonviolence some currency, whether it then proceeded to drag them in the mud or not is another question.

Rob: What were the implications for building up a nonviolent social change movement in Northern Ireland in the longer term, what effect did it have?

Ciaran: I think many people were moved to action and also to nonviolent action as a result of the Peace People impulse. That is good in itself. Whether the very fact that the Peace People disintegrated as a movement in circumstances that were extremely unpleasant will inhibit a future impulse, possibly an impulse of a similar type, has to be put as the other side of the story.

Anyone trying say in a moment of civil war to do something similar would come up against the same thing that I certainly encountered many's a time – you're wasting your time, that people do not change, you've no chance, you're pie-in-the-sky, all these sort of criticisms would have added to them – look, that crowd in 1976, they had the world behind them, they had the world media, they had the governments behind them, they had money, they got the Nobel Prize, they had everything going and look what happened to them.

So there's that against it. At the same time I like to think, and I hope this isn't just wishful thinking, that having felt the highs, felt the lows, and survived, that the experience – and I'm not just talking about myself but about quite a wide number of people – who'd had their hopes lifted and their eyes opened very considerably, and then plunged into a sense of distress if not outright despair, and having survived those experiences that a much more mature, more enduring, movement for nonviolence may profit from those experiences.

Derry Peace and Reconciliation

What follows is an agreed extract from a longer interview with four of the key people in the Derry Peace and Reconciliation Centre; **Margaret O'Donnell, Michael Durey, Sam Brown and Peter Simpson**. The interview took place in September 1985.

Rob: Maybe if you could begin by saying something about how the group began, and whether the people who were involved at the beginning had been involved in other peace groups and peace protests.

Margaret: Yes. There was one lady, Margaret Doherty, who has since died, she was involved in the peace group here in '72 which had come together here in the city, it was local people who were working behind the barricades at that time in the Creggan, and they felt they had to protest at the violence. That was a group of five people. They were just called peace women, they didn't have a formal title.

She didn't stay very long with the group. The group was formed late in August, early September 1976, and Margaret and her husband and daughter left about the Christmas, or January 1977. The rest of us that were in the group or joined the group were all community workers. We have found that a very enlightening experience in the sense that we were working in the community anyway, therefore we're not starting from scratch. This has been a bonus because when you're working as a community worker you're aware of all sorts of problems experienced by people and people will come forward and identify things that are happening and ask you for help. This is probably why a lot of people come to see Sam or Jimmy or Michael or myself.

Rob: What was the motivation at that time in '76 in coming together, presumably it was under the label as a Peace People group?

Margaret: Yes, the idea was that we felt violence was wrong, from a moral point of view as well as a practical point of view. Everything was appallingly wrong and while we were aware that the conflict had been going on for a couple of hundred years, simmering as it were, we felt violence was not going to solve it. I'm still of the same opinion that violence is not going to solve our problems, and there's no solution coming out of the point of anybody's gun except more agony and bitterness, more jails, more grey hairs and so on.

In very simple terms a number of us got together when the Peace People wanted to branch out from Belfast and they came down and saw Margaret Doherty, and Joyce Kelly, and they formed a small working group, and we're still here. We departed from them in 1980. We were working down in a wee tatty old building in Orchard Street and we moved into this,

the land-lord had put the rent up and we couldn't afford it, we moved to London Street which is more central anyhow, and we've been able to get on with the work to the best of our ability.

Rob: How did you find the relationship with the Peace People developing in terms of the typical relationships between Derry and Belfast, and also other Peace People groups around?

Margaret: To be fair to everyone, to ourselves and Belfast, there has always been this view that Belfast because it's the capital city that's where everything goes on, we've heard this many many times in many many places. We would maybe go along with our point of view and find that people in Belfast were totally in opposition or partially in agreement or whatever. There was always a communications gap which made things difficult. That in the end was the main reason why we left, we felt that if we always had to be trying to get across our point of view to Belfast, and vice versa, we're wasting time, that it was too big and just something that didn't work.

But in the early days we were hopeful that we could work out something, that each area would look after its own interests best and try to find some practical projects that would help that particular area, but relate very much to the main body in Belfast. But it didn't work out that way.

Rob: One of the questions there is whether you actually found the Peace People name a hindrance rather than a help in terms of your work?

Margaret: That was one of the main hindrances, the high media profile. We were conscious at the time of the high media profile but there wasn't much anyone could actually do about it. I wouldn't say that the people at the Peace People in Belfast were to blame for it, the media were coming from all over the world, somehow or other it was a phenomenon that the media desired to cover. That seemed to take up a lot of precious time. And then as well some article would be edited and put in a local paper here and we would be getting the flack the next day because of something the leaders had said.

The high media profile also gave the impression, probably wrongly, that this was all people were into it for, to get their ego polished, to get attention and self-seeking. And it wasn't really, they were the most genuine people to meet and I still know them, they genuinely wanted to work for peace but there didn't seem to be time to get our act together. We spent several years at it, trying to get our act together, and in the end we felt that the kindest thing to all concerned would be to go it alone.

Rob: In the period when you were connected with the Peace People did you receive much in the way of help and financial help from the Peace People?

Margaret: They did their best with the resources they had and they gave us what they could afford, we'd have to give them credit for that. When we opened this small centre here, we got it at a rent of £15 a week and at that stage we didn't have that much money, in fact we'd none, they came to our aid with help at that time and we were very grateful for it. Since then we have survived in a very piecemeal fashion.

We felt this was an extension of the Belfast centre, that this was another centre, Belfast was one and this was one and they planned to open a centre in Strabane. So things looked good at that stage, '77 - '78, but as time went on we discovered that the whole thing didn't mesh together.

Rob: Have you continued informal links with some of the people in Belfast?

Margaret: Oh yes, we would meet them at conferences and anything of mutual interest. We're not in the business of falling out with people in reconciliation no matter who they are.

Sam: One other thing would be that if you had a good idea here by the time you got it passed through Belfast and back down again it was too late, it took too long.

Rob: Just one other question about the early days was whether there was very much difference of opinion within the group here in Derry or whether that affected your work, what kind of debate there was within your group?

Margaret: There was regular meetings and we would have a meeting here and we'd have an agenda and come to conclusions, and a couple of us would be sent to represent the group. You'd get to Belfast and discover there was all sorts of other things going on, you'd get a chance to explain your point of view but sometimes you felt as if you were a small group

of people coming from the outskirts somewhere up to the big city. Maybe it wasn't consciously done and we certainly tried to get our points of view across. It was a futile difficulty with communication.

Rob: That's the question I wanted to ask, was there much discussion within the group here, in terms of differences of opinion, or having discussed it were people fairly unanimous in terms of what they wanted to do in Derry?

Margaret: We always tried to be reasonably clear about what we wanted to do. In Belfast they always listened. But this was the big question, how much does a small city of 90,000 people relate to a city that has 400,000 people. Our projects probably didn't seem like great ideas at the time. At the end we decided to carry on with our projects and go it alone.

Rob: Was there any relationship with other groups around in the west of the province?

Margaret: We met on a regular basis with the Strabane group, which has since disbanded, and we discussed their problems and so on. They did for a short time have a small drop in centre which was funded by the Peace People, Belfast. Then that closed down through redevelopment so far as I recall.

Rob: How has work developed since 1980?

Margaret: Our view is if you have a project it must be practical. I've had a few big ideas in my time and the lads had to pull me sharply down to rock bottom. There's no good going into a project without having full information on it – is it going to work, is there enough people to run the project, is there people interested, is it possible to do it, is there people here with the ability to do it. Based on that we go ahead. Most of the projects are based on community; current research on the causes of cultural division, we've been doing that for a couple of years now; narrowing the gap between police and community. Those are nettles that have to be grasped.

Rob: You have seven project areas there. Michael, how much work is involved in the social welfare advice centre, it looks pretty busy.

Michael: The social welfare advice centre is something we got into a couple of years ago. We brought it in because there was a demand. We are very fortunate being a peace and reconciliation group in that we cater for all sections of the community, and all sections of the community use the social welfare advice centre. We advise them on anything that falls loosely within the term welfare, it doesn't have to be DHSS benefits (unemployment benefits etc), it could be housing. We'd go and represent people at tribunals. We take it from A to Z. Tenants groups and other agencies would refer people to us.

Margaret: Michael is a member of the public-police liaison committee along with myself, Michael has been there for 13 years, I have only been there for 3. People might come along in the first instance for social welfare advice but they'll come along also because they've had someone arrested or someone in prison or something to do with the current situation.

Sam: Which no one else touches.

Margaret: So that's a particular part of our social welfare advice. Other people would deal strictly within the DHSS (Department of Health and Social Services) parameters.

Rob: Sam, you're involved with the minibus and projects associated with that.

Sam: We're very lucky that we've got the goodwill of the community, on all sides no matter what part of town. The bus doesn't be touched because all sections of the community get to use it. It's there for their benefit and we've yet to have any trouble at all from anybody concerning the minibus because they know that if they want it they can get it.

Rob: Do you feel any conflict in your work between working for reconciliation and working for change? Or are the two things integrated within your approach?

Margaret: Poverty in any society must help conflict along. There's 30% unemployed in this city, right across the board. Obviously the underlying problem of poverty leads on to others. This is where community workers like ourselves can sometimes help.

People sometimes define peace as doing something about conflict now and reconciliation as trying to do something for the future. At the weekend there was a young soldier killed, horrific event, absolutely horrific. Whether it's true or not it was said other young soldiers over-reacted to control a rioting crowd, and things went from bad to worse. There's problems

there; problems of communication between the people concerned; a lot of people getting a lot of media coverage out of the whole thing. Perhaps during the week some of us will try to find out what really happened if it's humanly possible.

Peter: The fault if there is a fault doesn't lie with the army, it lies with government. If the system only allows them to take action in a riot then the easiest thing is to provoke a riot and slug it out, hurt a few people, rap a few knuckles, break a few heads, that's what they're doing in effect.

Margaret: Human beings being human beings will react as human beings. If we're all interested in peace we should see what if anything we can do about preventing resentment.

Peter: Pull them out.

Margaret: That's a personal point of view.

Peter: But all your co-religionists want them out and many of my co-religionists want them out too. There'll always be complaints about the army even if they didn't start a riot or fire one plastic bullet.

Margaret: We all have our own particular points of view and we debate them, and you've just heard an example of how we do so without falling out. As Peter so rightly said the death of this young fellow has got lost in the post-mortem of the follow up. If people are saying that the problem is, and as we've thought it all along, two communities lacking respect for each other, lacking understanding for each other, differing beliefs and values, different identities, and different cultures, not knowing enough about each other's culture – each other's culture is a sort of threat. We've learnt a great deal ourselves in our research into the causes of cultural division, and we're hoping to put it all together so that we understand a bit more about each other's culture.

Rob: The relations between the police and the community is an area you've been involved in.

Margaret: All along. Michael for example feels, as someone who has been in politics, that working in community work and for peace and reconciliation is far more rewarding and could be far more useful because there's no political axe to grind. We all have different points of view, some of us vote, some of us don't, but we argue the toss about everything and we discuss everything openly here. Everyone's point of view must be understood and we invite people to come here and we go and talk to people, the army, police or whoever, or people in the different cultural organisations, this is all part of increasing our understanding.

To go back to the origins of the Peace People; did any of us in 1976 fully understand really, or even one percent, the depth of the origins of the conflict? Did any of us fully understand the problems facing those who would work for reconciliation?

Peter: I think most certainly a lot of us did. A lot of people did not who were no part of this movement at all. The movement failed because of that word peace, peace means nothing, reconciliation means a great deal. I mind being here in '76 and listening to a lot of flowery talk, most of the work I did in '76 was practical, not flowery talk and I got results, so did she, so did you, so did Mickey Durey. A lot of people didn't get any practical result because they didn't know what they were about, they thought that marching around the place with a big banner was wonderful.

For me to make a statement condemning anyone for killing someone presupposes they've no right to kill him. They think they have a right. Part of the understanding process is understanding what makes them tick.

Sam: Our main aim should be to show them that that isn't the way.

Margaret: That there is an alternative; albeit a very long, hard, difficult road but there is a nonviolent alternative.

Sam: Also the football matches, the dart matches, it's getting people to know one another from different communities. It's quite hard to throw a stone at somebody you know very well.

Rob: Have you found a conflict in your work between your work for reconciliation and for political and social change? There may be aspects that people don't like and therefore react against you and the other aspects of your work?

Margaret: Yes, that's very very true.

Peter: You have to be tough.

Margaret: People look on us as a small group, and what we're doing is 'political' with a small 'p', not party political. Let's say a group of party politicians are doing something about problem A, the fact that maybe we've been working quietly on it for a couple of years will probably not be very accept-able, and you'd find people taking odd stands about the whole thing. We're not doing it to get our backs slapped, we're doing it because it's something needs doing about.

When we used to resettle young people out of their environment, and we spent many long years at it, along with other people, we discovered people had to start living in their own environment, irrespective of what was happening. We tried to understand what led people into moving out of their environment. We did this quietly and with great confidentiality. Out of this came an understanding that people would have to be resettled in their own environment with very rare exceptions.

Rob: Resettled within Derry?

Margaret: Yes, resettled within their own area.

Peter: Not giving them a free ticket out of here so they can beat up some other old woman in London.

Margaret: A lot of people did go and take their problems with them and this didn't help, and they wanted home again anyway. Bul there were people glad of the chance to settle somewhere else and have another go at their lives.

Peter: Mainly families.

Rob: You've found over the years your work has developed into new areas.

Peter: It's fair to say about every 18 months or so this group changes direction. We look at these points and see if we can expand on this one or shift emphasis on that one.

Sam: We are getting across. We had a flag day and had about twenty young people came up to collect, that was an achievement in itself.

Margaret: They came because they've been running around in Sam's bus over the last couple of years to different venues and projects of their own interest. It developed out of what Sam was doing.

We could do a lot of things that would take the heat out of situations that would help for reconciliation if we had the money. We just exist from month to month.

Sam: Usually we're in debt.

Rob: How many people have you involved?

Margaret: Thirteen people here, some work seven days a week and some whatever time they can.

Sam: Out of that twelve each has their own contacts for different things. We have enough people at the moment working for we haven't any room to bring in any more.

Margaret: We have two ACE workers at the moment. That's been the single most useful thing.

Hazel Senior

Hazel Senior was a founder member of the Holywood Peace Group and remained involved principally at the local level until eventually persuaded to become involved as a member of the Executive. When this interview took place she was chairperson of the Peace People Executive, a post which she held for two years and which ended in October 1986, though she remains on the Executive.

Rob: Is the Peace People just another reconciliation group?

Hazel: I think we would like to feel we aren't. Reconciliation groups come together usually for a purpose but we also have our Declaration, and I think perhaps that's what makes us really different. We have words that say we decry violence. that we are working together, that we want to make a better world, and the fact that we actually incorporate the Declaration into our membership that helps to make us that little bit different.

A lot of the work we do will be parallel with other peace groups. and perhaps one of the other things is that while practically all peace groups started off with rallies or public meetings, as we did, we persisted with our rallies – that's the first thing – we kept on and on with things like that when other groups didn't. They each had a rally and that was the end of it.

Also we ventured into more dangerous territory, getting involved in things that seemed political, and they were political – they weren't party political but they were political – issues of EPA (Emergency Provisions Act), the plastic bullet, the dirty protest, not because we had sympathy for the people they were perpetrated on but we felt the way things were done was wrong. You weren't going to gain anything by bursting into people's houses, willy nilly, looking for some-one who's bad, just because you had freedom under the EPA; to use plastic bullets was not the right thing – and we were saying that long before the other side wakened up to the fact that plastic bullets were a very lethal weapon.

When it came to the H Blocks, we tried our best to do things there and mediate in a dangerous situation, though we did not support the demand for political status. I think perhaps we could have gone along as a peace group working on social things, or religious things, as most peace groups do, but we had gone that little bit extra and that's what counts.

Rob: Most peace groups would have a spectrum of different kinds of people with maybe different interests involved. Is the Peace People similar?

Hazel: Oh yes, I think so. We have people who would tell you they were nationalists, but they weren't going to let that interfere with being Peace People, they would put the Peace People first and the other would be a hopeful aspiration. Just the same as we would have people who would be British or English, whichever way you want to put it, but who also want to live in peace and amity in Northern Ireland with their Catholic neighbours. And we actually have some Catholics who would tell you they are pro-British. We have all sorts of people here, people who are religious, some of our members would be very involved in ecumenical things, in the charismatic movement, we have other people who say rightly or wrongly that the Peace People would nearly be their religion – working for peace – we have a whole spectrum.

Rob: Going back to the past, there used to be a considerable tension in the early days between local groups, Fredheim – the central office, and the Executive. And I suppose there was a trend towards the Peace People becoming centralised with the decline in numbers of local groups. Can you comment on that whole area?

Hazel: Yes. I'm actually quite surprised to hear you saying that so dogmatically. Take our own group and I can only speak for the Holywood group, I don't think we ever felt that, and I don't think the Ballymena people did. I can't speak for a lot of the groups. I think there were some groups that perhaps felt that big daddy was watching you at the top.

The only feeling for the people at Fredheim from our group was one of utter respect for the people who were right in the thick of everything and who were having to answer all the slings of publicity and all the arrows of other people's hard words. Certainly so far as the Executive is concerned, speaking as an ordinary member, and having a husband who was on the Executive for quite a while and who had to come here for very long hours and had to suffer being on an Executive where there was a fair amount of argument and discussion; I never had any, and I don't think ordinary members had any, negative feelings towards the Executive at all. I think most of them were very glad there were people to go on the Executive and they weren't the ones that had to be there making the decisions, So I'm quite surprised to hear you say that, I really am.

And Fredheim centralisation; well, I suppose almost every group, every organisation, has a central place and there is perhaps a little bit of them and us, but that's because we didn't get around to knowing 'them'. Now that I have become a part of the 'them', over the last two or three years, I felt it really is a myth, everybody here wants contact with the out-side people.

Rob: Right. Would you feel the way that publicity was given to the Peace People harmed your work?

Hazel: Yes, I think so. The initial publicity got everybody together, and it was great, it really was, everybody getting up and going and all that. But then when the Peace People settled down to being an organisation, I think perhaps everyone expected a further miracle. If getting all those people out on the street was a miracle, and I myself felt it was a near miracle at the time that it happened, I felt it was a wonderful thing and I will always feel that, always, always, always.

I feel that having done that, the leaders were just ordinary people when it came to the bit and there was no way they could pull rabbits out of hats. When we didn't immediately produce peace for Northern Ireland – when nothing immediate happened then people began to say – I told you so, and this negative thing came up. Because I think the people in the Peace People at that stage were all strangers coming together, coming from different areas, they all had different visions of what peace in Northern Ireland was, and being flung together like that they had to clash, there was no way – there were people coming from the Falls and East Belfast meeting for the first time.

When it came to actually talking it out the politicians couldn't talk it out. Ordinary people were just left. And of course every time we did anything or said anything, and by 'we' I mean the Peace People, if it didn't appeal to one side of the fence or the other, or to people, or to politicians, it was lost. Because we were people in the dark.

Rob: Since 1980 the Peace People have settled down to a more quiet image at least so far as publicity is concerned. Does that also mean it has been static in the period?

Hazel: No, I don't think so. I think we have extended our youth work very considerably since then because our camps have been set up in a much more structured way, so that we have pre-camp, camp, follow up to camp links, and we are spreading, with taking on the farm we have made strong links in the Coleraine area which means we are going into places we haven't been before. And the farm itself is opening up all sorts of new vistas. Through Youth for Peace and the camps we have made strong connections down around the Lurgan area which is very important, and again this is an outside Belfast area that we haven't been in previously and where there is a need for reconciliation work.

Our prison work has extended in the work with families. On justice work, we are not doing so much of that but it is very fair to say that it was through the initial efforts of people like Tom Foley and Steve McBride that the CAJ (Committee on the Administration of Justice) was set up. And because we don't have the expertise we are happy for some of our people to belong to CAJ and for them to do that sort of thing from there. If things come up we have been quietly involved when necessary.

Rob: The nearest that the Peace People has as a goal in relation to Northern Ireland apart from peace is the creation of a 'common identity'. Where can one place that goal on the political spectrum; would it be possible to place it in the unionist camp, or is it outside the whole party political area?

Hazel: I think that is one of the toughest questions. That is a phrase we have used, the 'Northern Irish identity'. In fact I think it must have been Ciaran who coined that, I don't think I ever heard that expression pre-Peace People. I don't know, certainly it's one of the ingrained things, that we should try to do something about Northern Ireland and people in Northern Ireland coming together to accept one another, warts and all, and until you can do that I think the politicians are only wasting their time talking – I'm not knocking the Anglo-Irish Agreement or integration or integrated education or any other solution, but unless we and the other reconciliation agencies find some way to help people find a common identity it all seems pointless.

Rob: How does the Peace People relate to nonviolence, is it just an interest of some people within the spectrum of the membership of the Peace People?

Hazel: Now that is hard. Some of our people are very much, if I may use the phrase, into nonviolence, and this means that perhaps they are just as involved in the nonviolent aspect worldwide. For others I feel that they're interested in peace in Northern Ireland and that nonviolence might come into their vocabulary, equally I think in some ways people regard it as an academic thing. It's not something we've gone into in depth, it's a word that's been used but not necessarily been studied in depth.

Rob: What common threads do you see between the Peace People in 1976 and the Peace People in 1986?

Hazel: Well, we still have the dedication and I think that perhaps that is the main thread. We still have Mairead with her complete commitment to peace and nonviolence, which I think is very important, we have had her from the beginning, if you can put all that on one person. Because a great many of the early people are still with us, either in body or if you meet them, in mind, they say 'are you still going, oh good, I'm doing this or I'm doing that'.

I think there's a thread even with people who have fallen away completely. I think that they were so influenced by the early days, they're into other aspects of the same sort of work. I don't think it'll ever stop.

Rob: And your hopes for the future of the Peace People?

Hazel: Well, I would like lots of new members and all the sorts of easy things like that. I would just hope that people would forget what they think were the wrong things we did in the past, and that they would recognise that we are not interested in an important image for ourselves as individuals or as an organisation. We are just interested in creating situations where people can come together and see the other person's point of view. We can't hope for total reconciliation but we hope we would do something to help people work for peace themselves.

Mairead Maguire

Mairead Maguire, formerly Mairead Corrigan, was at the heart of the Peace People from the beginning, and was the aunt of the Maguire children who were killed in August 1976. She gave up her job as a secretary to work for the Peace People. Now married to Jackie Maguire and with two of her own children, as well as three step-children - a nephew and two nieces- she lives on the County Down coast but is still involved in the Peace People as much as she can.

Rob: What achievements can you see personally and for the Peace People over the last ten years?

Mairead: For me personally, the fact that I was able to help my sister Anne's family when she died. I moved into their home and helped Jackie, with his young family, Marie-Louise, Joanne and Mark.

Regarding the Peace People's achievements, I don't like to dwell too much on achievements because it's hard to measure what a Peace Movement does or what any of us do in our lives. I believe that those of us in the Peace Movement must not allow our work to depend on results or achievements but rather do the very best we can and persevere in our efforts. However, we can say that in 1976, we helped to turn people's minds away from violence to peace, and we helped to give some people hope and belief in themselves again,

Rob: And the downturn in violence you attribute to the Peace People?

Mairead: I do believe we helped this process. I think that it can be shown statistically that from 1969 up to 1976 Emergency laws were not solving any problems, as the violence was going up. Indeed many of us believe Emergency laws only fuel the situation and are counterproductive. From August 1976 there was a tremendous decrease in violence. I think people were given the courage to stand up against the violence themselves and they were the ones who made the difference. I believe the only ones who can stop it are the people here in Northern Ireland, standing up for life, and working for justice and human rights for all.

The response of the government to this process of peace was to implement their Emergency laws even more severely. The resultant news reaching the communities of "interrogation in Castlereagh" put a halt to many people's participation in the process of peace and violence began to start again. It is also noteworthy that while the IRA continued their campaign of murder and violence, the UDA called a ceasefire and set up their 'New Ulster Political Research Group'. I believe that the Peace People helped create an opportunity for peace – some used it, some abused it, and many more just simply ignored it.

Rob: The other side of achievements is failings or failures; what do you feel strongest about that could have been different within the Peace People or within what the Peace People achieved or could have achieved during these years?

Mairead: Well, the worst thing I ever did was to accept the Nobel Peace Prize money personally, which was £38,000 and a gold medal. I have asked the Ulster Museum to accept the gold medal as a gift to the Northern Irish people. The Nobel Peace Prize money awarded to Betty and myself in late 1977 was the first occasion of a very painful difference between us. For her own good reasons Betty decided to keep the Nobel Peace Prize money. It broke my heart not to put the money directly into the movement, as was originally agreed but because of Betty's decision, I decided to accept it for better or worse and not to act on my own. The memory that we accepted the money personally stays with people and it damaged the Peace People enormously.

Looking back, I am sorry that we failed to hold onto the trust which is so important for relationships. When Betty, Ciaran and I decided to join together at the beginning to work for peace, even though the three of us were so different there was an immediate hand between us, and at the heart of that bond was trust. There is no doubt that if people trust each other they can do anything, but once the trust has gone, everything becomes impossible.

For whatever reasons, perhaps we were trying to do too much and we lost sight of our relationships and the fact that people are more important than projects, or perhaps we did not take enough time to meditate and pray for our own inner peace,

however, it is a fact that by the winter of 1979/80 the Peace People themselves had become unpeaceful and the trust which had made it possible to hold so many people together, from so many different backgrounds and viewpoints, had gone.

This breakdown of trust and the Executive's discovery that it had been given misleading information about German funds, both in terms of the amount available, and the conditions under which the Peace People might benefit from these funds, led to a crisis in the Executive committee, resulting in the departure of Betty and Peter from the Executive. Because this was such a difficult matter, involving people so personally the Executive decided to make no statement about it.

This pledge to remain silent left the way open to false press reports. A journalist reported that Betty and I, the 1976 Nobel prize winners, had split over Ciaran McKeown's alleged support for the provisional IRA prisoners' dirty protest. Not only did Ciaran never support the prisoners' dirty protest, but he was the person who first articulated the Peace People policy on Emergency status for Emergency Prisoners. Moreover, Ciaran, Betty, Peter and myself were at one in support of the Peace People's policy.

In an attempt to stop further press reports the Executive issued a statement to news editors naming a journalist as the source of inaccurate, unchecked and partial reports. The statement also referred to 'sabotage'.

Though this statement was never carried in the news media, the journalist sued the four spokespersons and the Peace People. The Executive sought legal advice, and this was that they should apologise as otherwise they would be faced with prolonged and potentially expensive litigation. The apology which the Executive was asked to sign, said that the journalist's reports were not inaccurate, unchecked and partial in any significant degree. The Executive minutes record the unanimous agreement of the Executive that such a statement would itself be inaccurate, but for various reasons, the Executive eventually decided, on a majority vote, to publish the inaccurate apology.

In my opinion, stated at the time when Ciaran and myself recorded our dissent, we were wrong in settling the litigation by issuing a statement that we knew to be inaccurate, and it is my regret that we did not as a committee show the same courage in dealing with this litigation as we had shown when we dealt with the painful events of February, 1980.

Although I am now satisfied that the journalist did not act out of malice, and did not intend in any way to sabotage the work of the Peace People, however, the reports effectively established the inaccuracy that the Peace People had split over the 'H' Blocks issue.

I would not, however, agree with people who said we should not have tripped so much because I believe our message of non-violence is for the world, and we all need each other. Going to Argentina, joining with Adolfo Perez Esquivel and twice nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize (which he received in 1980) was our important contribution to the spread and development of the non-violent movement in the world today. Similarly, I regard our visits to the United States as an opportunity to give encouragement to those struggling non-violently. It is important too that Irish Americans see the Irish question as not one of Irish unity but rather one of how we all can create relationships and structures based on human dignity and respect for life.

Rob: Finally what hopes do you see for the future of the North?

Mairead: I'm very hopeful. I believe more and more people are beginning to recognise that we have got to find ways and means to live peacefully together. Many people acknowledge that violence creates more violence and is not acceptable in a civilised society. More are turning onto the path of non-violence to create just social and political structures.

However, real change cannot come until everybody in Northern Ireland realises they have political responsibility and can't leave things up to politicians. We must all make a conscious decision to be part of the 'process of reconciliation' of our two traditions. If we are to be genuinely reconciled we must all be prepared to give something of ourselves. The churches could take up more urgently important issues of non-violence, justice and reconciliation. They need also to remind people here that they commit the sin of idolatry when they pledge their allegiance to 'flags' when in fact as so called Christians their allegiance is to God and his commandment 'not to kill' and to 'love your enemies'.

I am hopeful, however, that the whole concept of nationalism is beginning to crumble; soon the days of men arming themselves under flags and going out to kill their brothers and sisters will be gone. We look at television films now and see how the Romans threw children to the lions and we ask in horror 'How could they have been so cruel?', 'Why didn't someone stop that?'. I know the day will come when future generations will ask – How did they spend billions of pounds on nuclear weapons instead of feeding the hungry, and why didn't someone stop nations arming and going out to kill other human beings?

So I really feel that in Northern Ireland we are only part of the struggle going on as the human family tries to walk a 'new road' where the sanctity of life is upheld and all human rights protected. We will find our peace, as I do believe that the inherent goodness in the vast majority of the men and women here will come to the front. Once this force has been released we will make a society to be proud of. 'New ideas' and 'new attitudes' can be brought about by active nonviolence and genuine reconciliation, and this I believe is quietly happening in Northern Ireland, and in the world.

So, I have the greatest hope that what is growing out of so much prayer and pain will be a more genuine form of human living. And I think that our challenge is not to stop. We might not see this in our time, but I firmly believe if we keep going our children will inherit a new way of living in love with all humankind. And that's what I'm doing it for...

Margaret Watson

Margaret Watson was involved in the Peace People for just under a year yet it had a profound effect on her life. She began her involvement as a mother and housewife; she has since studied law and now qualified as a barrister.

Rob: What did the Peace People mean for you when you were involved?

Margaret: I had never done anything like this before. My husband and father were a wee bit nervous about me taking a public stance. I remember saying to my husband "Look, the men have been trying for years, now it's the women's turn." That was what it was for me, an opportunity as an ordinary person, with no particular skills or expertise, to be enabled to stand up and say what I felt was happening in Northern Ireland. It was a tremendous opportunity for people like me.

Rob: You were involved for how long, and what did you do?

Margaret: Roughly a year or so. I had offered to go along and help in the office and I had been told it was especially in the afternoon that they were short of people, late afternoon and early evening because obviously all the people working in the office were housewives, mothers many of whom had to go home and make dinners and things. I was lucky in a way in that my husband, being a teacher, was normally home around four o'clock or so in the afternoon. So it evolved that I would be there to let the people away who had to make dinners. Eventually I was invited to go along and sit on the ad hoc executive, and then the first formal executive which was elected after the Killyhevlin Assembly.

I used to coordinate the buses for the rallies. I helped to organise the conferences, answered letters, spoke at meetings, and went around to groups to help to get them organised, that type of thing would have been my main activities.

Rob: What did you think at that stage the Peace People could achieve?

Margaret: I wasn't even thinking in terms of what it could achieve. I thought that the very fact I was standing up and saying "What is happening is happening against my wishes", that that in itself was an achievement. Even that the Peace People as an organisation, as a group, was giving an opportunity for an awful lot of people to say that was an achievement.

Rob: Do you feel you were conscientised through being involved, and did it bring other people into political involvement?

Margaret: Very much. I think that was the biggest bonus the Peace People brought along. When you were here in the office there were things that needed to be done and you went ahead and did them; you weren't even aware at the time, for example in helping to organise conferences I found I was doing things I never felt in my wildest dreams that I could.

I found I had opinions on all sorts of subjects that I never thought I had simply because I had never particularly given thought to these things, and it was only in discussion with other people that I found I had opinions which were as relevant as other people's. This gave me an opportunity to express them.

I also came into contact with people who had been in the peace movement for a long time. I remember the first meeting I sat at with John Morrow, I found that a terrific experience because John Morrow was able – he taught me a great lesson that night although I don't think I've learnt it particularly well but anyway – he was a very good exponent of it. We were talking about something and John Morrow didn't agree with it. John Morrow was able to contradict, to put an opposing point of view, to completely change the direction that a group of people were thinking, and yet he did it in a way that was very peaceful, very conciliatory, not getting people's backs up. He, and there were other people, helped me and other people to be

aware that there were things that were very small but very significant in other people's lives and we were able to do them and make a difference. To that extent it was very important for me and for other people.

I am now a member of Pax Christi. I would probably never have heard of Pax Christi if I hadn't been involved with the Peace People. There are other people working perhaps with prisoners groups or with welfare groups or community groups and organisations who I don't think would ever have heard of them or become involved in them if it hadn't been through the Peace People. A large number of people who are active, committed, and working away in Northern Ireland in many many different areas and spheres, which might either loosely or tightly be called peace work, wouldn't have been so except for the Peace People experience.

Rob: And your disillusionment with the Peace People organisation? How did that come?

Margaret: I think it started off that I felt there was a dividing line to a certain extent between the top of the movement and the people on the ground. I wasn't happy about the process for dialogue and consultation. Then I felt that in the direction it was taking, there was more emphasis on our media presence, that perhaps in planning for the direction of future activities of Peace People that there was too much attention focussed on how that would be received by the media, rather than the effect it would have on the Northern Ireland community and on peace or violence within the Northern Ireland community.

Rob: So things had to be media valuable?

Margaret: I think they had to be aware if they were going to get media coverage they wanted to keep. I think they recognised that it was keeping a high media profile had had a large measure of success for them in the past, and had resulted in many good things. There were others who didn't agree with me.

Rob: Anything else in general terms?

Margaret: People now talk in terms of the failure of the Peace People, and why did they fail. Surely to God after all this length of time we can now stop talking about the failure of the Peace People and look at what in fact it did achieve.

It's because we in Northern Ireland tend to be very disparaging about efforts like the Peace People that we give credence to the belief that some people have that it is only through violence that change can be effected. I think I would like to see more emphasis being placed on the positive things that came out of the Peace People, like the fact that people became aware that they, as ordinary individuals, had a voice, had a role to play, could do something, went out and became involved in their communities, became involved in activities and are now, in many instances, still working for peace.

Rob: Though there were people disillusioned in the same process.

Margaret: But nevertheless disillusioned it was to a large extent with the Peace People they were disillusioned, not necessarily with nonviolence or with work for peace and reconciliation. After the major split, I was invited to go down and meet some of the newly left people, ex-Peace People, and it was fantastic because they were all saying "Right, we've left Peace People. now what can we do? Where can we channel our energies and what can we become involved in now that will still carry on our work for peace?" I'm not necessarily talking about the people who came to the rallies but people who were active in local peace groups, many of them are still involved, I could go through a long, long list of names of people who became involved; they're in community groups, tenants groups, and they're still working away and still doing their own thing. That's to be applauded.

Rob: And you're very grateful for the Peace People experience?

Margaret: Grateful is not exactly the word I would choose! Let's just say I learnt a lot. It very much changed the course of my life. It made me much more aware of myself, maybe that would have happened but would have taken longer. I think knowing me it probably would have happened at some other stage. But certainly my involvement with Peace People did hurry the process along. I have many regrets about my time with the Peace People and my experience with the Peace People, an awful lot of regrets about it, but at the same time I really don't think I would have missed it, I'm glad I didn't miss it!

Marion Graham

Marion Graham, who along with her husband Norman has been a key figure in the continuing work of the Ballymena Peace Group, and has also been involved in the Peace People farm at Coleraine, talked about the group and their view of things.

Rob: How did Ballymena Peace Group start and evolve over the years?

Marion: Ballymena Peace Group evolved from the start of the Peace People, from the time of the marches when they started to organise buses to go to the various rallies. Having done that we decided we would like to keep the thing going and we kept up a routine of fortnightly meetings for years without a break until the last couple of years when we lost quite a lot of the active members and some of the old retainers fell on evil times, became ill and one thing and another and it just wasn't possible to have regular meetings. The loss of our meeting place was also quite a considerable blow.

Rob: How often do you meet?

Marion: We don't meet with any particular oftenness, we meet, when we feel there's something to meet for. We meet to plan coming events or we meet if there's some speaker available, such as last week we had a very good meeting.

Rob: It is interesting that you have kept up the association with the Peace People and also that the loss of your members has been through people moving away rather than people feeling disenchanting with your work.

Marion: Yes, we still keep in touch with the people who have moved away. If we've got something on we ring them up to see if by any chance they can come. They're all still members in spirit, it's just they've left the vicinity for various reasons.

Rob: So what kind of work have you tried to do over the years?

Marion: We have tried to do mainly fundraising, local community work, paper selling, support activities for the Belfast people when we can, consultatives (i.e. hosting consultative board meetings), putting on odd weekends, social things like for Belfast a trip to Portglenone forest every year at bluebell time, we have a picnic down there. The strawberry fair is really a joint social occasion and a fundraising.

Rob: Putting on the consultative meetings, is that to put an input into the whole decision making of the organisation?

Marion: Yes, to get them down here, we like to get the consultatives out of Belfast every now and again, they put them on in Newry as well. The group arranges the venue and the eats and so forth.

Rob: Can you make any assessment of your successes and failures, your achievements in the last ten years?

Marion: It's difficult, but we have put the Peace People's ideas into a lot of homes through the paper selling on a regular basis, over a longish time to certain customers, we have got a lot of confidence built up across the community and there's a large body of people who are willing to support cross-community activities now through knowing the peace group.

We have done a little bit on the side of welfare, for families who have got into political difficulties, and supporting welfare work in Belfast too in practical ways. We tried to run a public ecumenical service at the beginning of the year, for a number of years we did that, we haven't been doing that lately but we've got into other ecumenical work, the members of the group are very strong on that. It's very important in Ballymena which is known as a place that doesn't believe in ecumenism to have somebody who's doing something towards that end.

Rob: It's interesting too that while members might not always have seen eye to eye with decisions or things that were done either in Belfast or at Executive level, that the group cohesion has remained and the interaction with Belfast has remained. Can you explain the fact that people haven't gone off in a huff?

Marion: It's hard to really explain it, but we think that the bitterness which has grown up in the ghetto areas in Belfast – it's incomprehensible almost to us out here, we haven't got the same experience as people living up the Shankill Road or the Falls Road; we've got our own particular brand of bigots which we understand down here and we can work with them and do our level best with them. But we realise that our particular problem isn't quite the same problem that is confronting people in Belfast, and we don't always agree with the way that they are working into it, we think we can trust them to work on what they think is going to help in their position.

Rob: And you're happy to concentrate on what you want to do?

Marion: Yes, we're happy enough with that. And we know that personality difficulties are notorious among peace workers!

Rob: Well, I think in all voluntary organisations.

Marion: Yes. But we haven't come across too much of that in our own group.

Rob: And yourself and Norman are also involved in the farm at Kilcranny House, a new venture. It's interesting that the Peace People are doing something new.

Marion: Youth for Peace were aware that a certain number of youngsters were not great ones for ideas, they weren't ideas men who would sit and talk and discuss, they were wanting to work together on something. This seemed to be a requirement to give them a scope for that, and as well residential accomodation seemed to be called for in quite a number of fields of work of the Peace People. So we were quite in favour of having a rural base, I like to call it 'rural base', I think 'farm' is not quite the right name but however.

Rob: It's used in quite a loose sense, like Farset Farm in Belfast.

Marion: But we ran a farm weekend as a residential for Youth for Peace, they stayed in the house here, it was winter time and it was difficult to know what to do. So they did a quiz up and down the road looking into the lifestyle, methods of farming and planning etc. of the local farmers just up and down our road. They made a great impression on the local farmers. When they finished the quiz they offered to give them a hand and they did some work. But they got a lot of enlightenment from that because they found the variety of farm and the type of people the farmers were, and the life-style, all new to them. So they learnt a lot.

Rob: A final question on what future you see for Ballymena Peace Group? Where will your work take you in the future or is it a matter of responding to situations as they develop?

Marion: Well there's always something coming up where you'd like to make an input, on the local scene certain difficulties and places where you need to do something to deal with the situation, if only getting comments into the press to draw attention to certain problems.

Our group are mostly ladies with a fairly religious turn of mind and they believe in prayer a lot and they like to meet together in ecumenical groups, so we're linked out quite strongly to a number of other organisations. Though we're not hiding our light under a bushel, everybody knows they're there and involved in the Peace People. Just trying to put that influence out into the community is about the best thing we can do in Ballymena.

Rob: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Marion: We hope to be able to help in practical ways as far as possible. We're not completely just sitting here and praying! We're hoping to get some actual work done as well.

Peter McLachlan

One of the principal figures in the Peace People story, Peter McLachlan came to the Peace People with both a business and a party political background as a Unionist. He is now general secretary of Bryson House, Belfast.

Rob: What did you see yourself as trying to do when you were leader, when you were chairperson of the Peace People?

Peter: I had hoped, if I'd completed the two years which was the maximum that I'd have done as chairperson, that I would have left the movement with a solid programme of work which would show some effective results in the community over the long term, and that that work would have been properly financed. That was the aim I went for rather than a high profile, campaigning role which the organisation had had since 1976 and which had led to many people saying it was not delivering anything, it was just talking.

Rob: Regarding your job as projects officer, perhaps you could say something about that and also the feeling of some people, perhaps those who remained in the Peace People, that you did not pursue loan repayments sufficiently strongly.

Peter: All decisions about grants and loans and repayments were made corporately by the Trustees including Betty, Mairead and Ciaran. I carried out their instructions. The number of employment related loans were comparatively small, though one or two were fairly large. Some of them were recovered in their entirety. But if you're in employment development you don't expect anything like 100% return, wherever you're doing it.

The main thrust of the use of the money was in grants to charitable projects, and that was a very successful operation which led indirectly to the formation of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, now a trust of some millions doing exactly the same kind of work because it showed that by having such money available you could in fact open up a new strand of development in the community, and that that could be broadly cross-community and non-sectarian.

Rob: Did you feel it was possible to hold together within the Peace People both the prophetic, speaking out role of the Peace People and the quieter project work? How much of a conflict was there?

Peter: Well there was a conflict, and obviously in the early years one hoped that it would be possible for these two to live side by side. The prophetic role is always important and the prophetic role without some kind of implementation on the ground becomes an empty voice. Therefore the two need each other. The trouble is that they do fall into conflict, not just in the Peace People but in every context where they exist together, and it depends on a lot of mutual tolerance for them to be kept side by side. The sad thing about the Peace People is that in the end of the day they split apart.

Rob: How could it have been different?

Peter: It would have depended, I think, on the ability of the individuals to make a certain number of compromises which were not made, and to ensure that each had a proper regard for the other. And that would have had to extend right down the movement to those who were favouring one approach or the other.

Rob: Could you say something about how you saw the Peace People stand in relation to violence and nonviolence?

Peter: What is nonviolence? Is it just physical nonviolence or is it also verbal nonviolence and mental nonviolence. I have always held nonviolence to embrace all those three; I believe that verbal violence and mental violence can actually be more hurtful than physical violence. And I don't think we ever properly grasped that nettle within the Peace People and in the way we were doing our campaigning.

I'm not sure whether that problem was ever thought about in depth by the membership of the movement, it was certainly argued out in some discussions among some of the leaders, on occasions, and there were different perceptions between Ciaran and myself on that issue.

Rob: You see different definitions within the Catholic and Protestant communities on what is justice. Maybe you could say something about that and how it affected the discussions and work of the Peace People.

Peter: I see a very basic difference between the two cultures in the way all concepts are handled. The Protestant culture always deals in tiny steps, in tiny theses, with one issue at a time or one situation at a time, makes a judgement on it, uses the freedom of conscience and then comes to a decision and that's it, and then moves on to the next one. Whereas in the Roman Catholic culture ideas are always held inside a broad framework, inside which there may be quite a bit of flexibility, but there's a fairly rigid framework at the outside.

So when it comes to the question of justice you find the Protestants are always looking at the administration of a penalty to the individual who has transgressed, the concept is a punitive concept. If someone is guilty they are then punished, you establish their guilt. Whereas in the Roman Catholic community if you talk about justice you're talking about a concept within a framework of concepts, a concept of equality before the law. In popular discussion you'll very often find that when the word 'justice' is being used it is being used in those quite different senses by different people.

Rob: How did that affect discussion within the Peace People?

Peter: It led to a lot of confusion and miscommunication. I remember sometimes sitting down with a number of folk to try to get them to talk about what they saw justice to mean, and found that it was such a different concept, and that there was a total misunderstanding therefore about what people were about together.

Rob: How do you see the Peace People now?

Peter: Well, strangely to say I see they have gone very much along the line that I was trying to point during my chairmanship; that they would restrict their activities to a number of very worthwhile, clear, practical pieces of endeavour which would have some long term value in building a wedge of nonsectarian approach, particularly among the young people in the next generation. And if you look at the work they're doing at the farm, and the holidays, and the work with prisoners and prisoners' families, those are exactly the kinds of projects that during my chairmanship I was trying to foster.

What's very heartening about the way the movement has developed in its post-1980 phase is the way in which it has settled down to those practical programmes and at the same time managed to keep a useful campaigning role, from time to time saying some very important things both publicly and in private contacts, on issues that affect the development of a more peaceful society. In other words it's succeeded where we failed in combining the prophetic and the practical.

Rob: Finally if you could say something about the dynamism which you feel existed within the Peace People and which maybe people who left the Peace People took away with them. And something about the achievements of those who were in and stayed in, or those who were in and left.

Peter: There's no doubt that the impulse in 1976, through the three catalysts, Ciaran, Mairead and Betty, released an enormous wave of emotional energy into the people who were affected by it. The people who were affected by it were not necessarily the easiest of people, there were all kinds of reasons why people attached themselves to the Peace People, but on the whole they were people who had something to offer, something to give. I think it would have been impossible for all those folk to stay together over a very long period; it wasn't in the nature of human experience that that would happen. Many of them would eventually, even if there hadn't been all the tensions and disagreements which unhappily marred the development of the movement, have gone off elsewhere.

The positive side is this; had they remained tied up and locked inside the movement, the impetus that they felt and had the ability to channel into the community, might never have gone out into the community. But what happened was that many of those people, if not almost all of them, have gone on to do very remarkable things. Those who were closest to the centre of the movement are now to be found throughout Northern Ireland, developing non-sectarian social welfare, educational and other projects which would be a credit, any one of them, had they been done by the Peace People themselves.

If for example you take just one group, the group which I knew best because it was my local home group in Lisburn and three of the most involved people of the days in 1977 when they stood up to the loyalist strike and were out on the streets, stopping the bully boys from closing the shops. The convenor, Hazel Aicken, has set up Voluntary Service Lisburn, a major new voluntary agency absolutely tuned to the future, giving the young unemployed the chance to do work, jobs in the community.

Maeve Mulholland became one of the first parent governors of Lagan College, and has put in some incredible years of hard work in helping that important project off the ground. And the treasurer, Pat Campbell, has become the chairman of Women Together, which continues to pilot a whole series of support operations for worthwhile ventures in cross-community activity by women in some very active groups across the greater Belfast area. That's just three of the people who were motivated by that early period and if you look at all the other groups you'll find that the same kind of pattern can be traced.

Appendices: Further Reading

Recommended reading

There are four pieces on the Peace People which I would recommend for general further reading, They are quite different in style, focus and conclusions but together provide a good understanding of what was happening; two books, one dissertation, and one lengthy article.

- **“Mairead Corrigan, Betty Williams”** by Richard Deutsch, translated from the French by Jack Barnard. Barron's/Woodberry, New York, 1977. 199 pages. Also in French language edition, 1977.

This is the best source of information on the early Peace People, it takes the story to mid-1977. As the title might suggest it is written very much from a Mairead Corrigan/Betty Williams/Ciaran McKeown centre of the movement perspective and suffers, perhaps thereby, from being unduly optimistic and uncritical; the suggestion (p.193) that *‘Peace by Peace’* “*may even one day displace the two morning dailies in Ulster, the Irish News (Catholic) and the News Letter (Protestant), both of which are shamelessly sectarian*” is sheer fantasy even for 1977.

There's lots of useful or useless information about the leaders including Betty's account of smuggling a wounded IRA man over the border to the South early on in the current troubles (p.54) and Mairead's having been turned down to work as a Legion of Mary missionary in South America two years before the Peace People started.

It is sometimes inaccurate, as in asserting (e.g. p.131 & 165) that there had been no other peace movement in the North during the current troubles until the Peace People; smaller ones perhaps, but they did exist. It occasionally also suffers from mistranslation of official names and the odd typographical error. But these criticisms apart it is the best (the only fairly easily available) source for some of the early story, written from the centre of the movement.

- **“The Peace People Experience 1976-1979”** by Ann Fannin, unpublished dissertation for BA in Peace Studies, University of Bradford, 1986.

Written by someone who was at the very centre of the Peace People at the time period she covers, this dissertation by Ann Fannin (formerly Campbell) is a critical, feminist look at the whole experience – coincidentally with the same title as this pamphlet. Particularly focussing on the experience of some women who were heavily involved, she has written a valuable account of what happened and what went wrong with things both within the Peace People and on the wider Northern Ireland stage.

- **“A Cross of Wasted Suffering; The Peace People At War”** by Nell McCafferty, in *Magill*, August 1980.

A lengthy article of 13 pages of type (which doesn't include the accompanying headings or photos) in which one of Ireland's best known journalists presents an acerbic, sometimes impressionistic, sometimes detailed, account of the Peace People story to just after the 1980 split. This piece proved controversial for both Peace People and some former Peace People but is worth reading for its hard-hitting account.

- **“The Passion of Peace”** by Ciaran McKeown, Blackstaff Press, 1984, 319 pages; withdrawn from sale August 1985 following a libel suit.

This is a detailed, autobiographical account of Ciaran McKeown's passion of, or for, peace as much or more than it is the story of the Peace People. Almost the first half of the book is taken up with McKeown's life before the Peace People; the origins of his political and philosophical beliefs, student politics, the early troubles and his work as a journalist.

I have heard someone say they needed a dictionary to read it. I have found it readable but at a slow pace to allow the wealth of detail to sink in. Some of his political perception is stunning, as in making reference (p.73) to the authorities announcing with glee the discovery of (paramilitary) 'bomb factories' when the biggest one in Belfast – Shorts Missile Division – was heavily subsidised by the government! He also mentions (p.112) the British authorities' warning of IRA plans to make Northern Ireland ungovernable – two days before the loyalist UWC (Ulster Workers Council) strike of 1974!

Regarding the story of the Peace People it is obviously as he saw it. Sometimes he is self-critical as in saying (p.298) after the 1980 split; *“The other humiliating realisation was that I had put Betty Williams and Peter McLachlan in positions in which they could hardly have behaved other than they did.”*

In much of the book, Peace People part and before, something of the bitterness and savagery possible in Northern Ireland comes across; he mentions a couple of times (p.200, p.203) attacks made on Anne Maguire – she who had already gone to hell but not back over the death of her three children in the incident that began the Peace People story.

And it is, of course, the story from the centre of the movement. He does give the number of Peace People groups (e.g. on p. 265) but very little about any of them and their work. The story as he saw it at the centre is covered in considerable detail from the beginnings through to the aftermath of the 1980 split.

Peace People Publications

- *'Peace by Peace'*

'Peace by Peace', the Peace People paper, in some ways provides an invaluable account of the Peace People story and in other ways has many gaps. There's no doubting it had a difficult task but it looks like it could never make up its mind whether it was a) a newsletter about the Peace People, or b) a magazine about peace including the Peace People. It has tended to be the former.

Under Ciaran McKeown's editorship it was controversial for many Peace People but did not achieve a breakthrough to real discussion and dialogue about where the movement should proceed. Bob Overy, writing in 1978, said *"The lack of significant debate in their paper 'Peace by Peace' has been startling."*⁶⁶

The 'newsletter' type of approach as opposed to the magazine approach was further emphasised by the refusal to print a letter from Bob Rodwell written at the end of January 1980, which, among other things, attacked Ciaran McKeown over the *"espousal by you of a wholly artificial 'cause', the H-blocks protest"*. A 'magazine' approach to *'Peace by Peace'* would have welcomed such controversy as at least a stab at debate, whatever about the conservative politics expressed in this letter.

The nadir of *'Peace by Peace'* must have been at the time of the 1980 'split', when, instead of at least reflecting the pain and anguish felt on all sides – if 'the facts' could not be put – the lead story was reduced to sloganising: *"At long last, the Executive of the Peace People has assumed its responsibilities, and made it clear internally and externally that the Peace People is now a democratic organisation, and that all members of the Executive are equal, and that decisions of the Executive are to be upheld by members."*⁶⁷

'Peace by Peace' under the editorship of Steve McBride, who took over from Ciaran McKeown in April 1980 and continued until March 1985, was marked by Steve's detailed, and sometimes very observant, political comment. From the end of this period *'Peace by Peace'* went monthly, edited by Paul Smyth in a voluntary capacity. The size of the paper had previously been reduced to 8 pages to cut costs (and massive losses in the earlier days). In recent years the print run has been around 1,000 copies compared to 4,000 at its peak in the early days.

There has been an attempt to brighten up the layout and contents of the magazine, I always found the layout boring (formerly plenty of photographs, but no cartoons, and a 'serious' presentation). I must admit I did enjoy poring over back issues and got a sense of at least some debate and controversy in its pages.

But it is clear that the ordinary membership of the Peace People, then and now, however happy or unhappy they may have been with its contents, did not generally see it as a forum for debate on where the Peace People was at and going to. It was seen more as a herald for the Peace People, to be used by flying squads and to provide general information about the Peace People and assorted other subjects of interest and concern to both members and non-members.

Other Peace People publications

"The Price of Peace" (1976)

"The Path of Peace" (1979)

"The Person of Peace" (1980),⁶⁸

A trilogy of pamphlets written by Ciaran McKeown.

⁶⁶ Bob Overy, *"How effective are peace movements"*, page 38; Peace Study Paper No. 2, Bradford School of Peace Studies/Housmans, 1978.

⁶⁷ *Peace by Peace'*, Vol.5 No. 4.

⁶⁸ All three were reviewed by Roger Courtney in Dawn 59-60; Angela Mickley also reviewed *"The Path of Peace"* in Dawn 51.

“*The Price of Peace*” in particular was very influential for some people; Peter McLachlan has pinpointed reading it as the reason he was attracted to join the Peace People – he identified so much with what was said. These documents aimed to be a political and philosophical prescription for the Peace People and others in Northern Ireland. The process starts with looking around your neighbourhood at local problems, getting together with neighbours over a wee cup of tea, and taking it from there (“*The Price of Peace*”, page 16).

“*The Path of Peace*” is more specific in the possibilities he would like to see, including canton-sized communities of up to 5,000 adults, and then “*An Assembly of the representatives of such villages or cantons will be envisaged to handle problems beyond the scope of local areas.*”

He goes on; “*Personally I would like to see a Senate established first, by 1981, a Provisional Assembly by 1982, and an agreed Assembly based on defined constituency boundaries by 1984, by which time also the complete dismantling of the apparatus of emergency would have been effective and we would be enjoying community policing by consent...*”

The Peace People have also produced occasional other pamphlets, for example ‘*Rights and Responsibilities – A young person’s guide to the Law and Emergency Legislation in Northern Ireland*’ by Tom Foley and Peter Graham (1980), and ‘*Time for a change – the (Temporary/ Emergency Provisions Act. A submission to Parliament on the case for returning to Norma/ Judicial Process...*’ (also 1980). Both are worthwhile publications.

Slightly more esoteric was the publication in 1979 of 3 pamphlets by James B. Galway; ‘*The British Myth in Contemporary Ireland*’, ‘*True Democratic Sovereignty or Financial Slavery*’ and ‘*The Power of Money*’.⁶⁹ I would have thought some of his history in the first pamphlet was rather ropery. The second pamphlet consisted of quotations half a century old. All in all he pointed to some of the problems but without thinking through the answers; as part of a series on economic and political thought the pamphlets would certainly have had a place but by themselves represented an unusual publishing choice – even if James Galway was treasurer of the Peace People.

Also of considerable use, although more an internal compilation than a publication, are the reports written for the Peace People Assemblies (2 a year until 1981 and then 1 Autumn Assembly since).

Other books on the Peace People

“*To Kvinner For Fred*” is not, as a humorous monoglot explanation might have it, the story of an assignation at Kvinner on behalf of Fred, but the Norwegian for “Two women for peace” (by Richard Hermann and Gerda Vislie, with a translation of Ciaran McKeown’s “*The Price of Peace*“, published by Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, Oslo, 1976, 102 pages). It includes a short historical introduction.

“*The Peace People of Northern Ireland – impressions of Mairead Corrigan, Betty Williams and the Peace Movement*” by Dairy O’Donnell, Widescope International Publishers, Victoria, Australia, 1977, 122 pages. This may be a fairly instant and impressionistic book with a number of minor errors (e.g. “*Ceirran McKeown*”) but it’s certainly not dull.

Mairead Corrigan understandably refused to launch it at the Hilton Hotel, Sydney, during her Australasian tour because it described her on the back cover as “*Mairead, the virgin martyr, sacrificing her youth and her personal desires on the altar of a higher destiny.*” The “*virgin martyr*” label is repeated inside the book in the text.

This sub-sexual analysis also appears in what must be the most novel explanation of the origins of the Peace People (page 10); “*Married adults living a celibate existence build up energies which might otherwise be expressed in conjugal intercourse. Betty had been denied this normal outlet for her sexual or procreative drive for several months.*” (Her husband had been at sea) “*Could it have been this sublimated procreative urge that provided the impetus for the tremendous outpouring of energy that went into the conception of the Peace Movement?*” I will not attempt to take this sexual imagery any further in relation to the Peace People or any other political or social movements but it could make for a fun time for those who wish to pursue the matter (between consenting adults of course).

More seriously, though, the book does touch on a number of wider issues of concern in relation to the North.

⁶⁹ All three of James Galway’s pamphlets were reviewed in Dawn 51

Unpublished dissertations on the Peace People

Martin O'Brien's "*A study of the interaction between the media and the 'Peace People', a Northern Irish Social Movement*", written for BSSc. (Hons), Queen's University, Belfast, 1986. This is a detailed and competent analysis of the three Belfast dailies at five particular points in the Peace People story.

Another QUB BSSc. dissertation is that of Alison Pike in 1980 on "*The Community of the Peace People*", which makes an interesting and useful read on the matter.

"*A Quiet Revolution; The Peace People Of Northern Ireland*" is the title of a thesis written by Mary Sheehan for the Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, 1982; a fairly descriptive account of the bones of the Peace People story, with considerable detail on the rally phase, though with a few inaccuracies through unfamiliarity with the Irish situation and history.

Mathilde Stevens' "*A Critical Examination Of Peace Groups In Northern Ireland With Particular Reference To PACE (Protestant And Catholic Encounter), Women Together And The Peace People*" is a 30 page special study done for the Youth and Community Work Course, Ulster Polytechnic, 1979; it is a useful comparison of the three groups mentioned and puts them into context.

Vox Pop at Belfast City Hall

I did a 'vox populi' exercise outside the City Hall, Belfast, on a weekday lunchtime in September 1986 to see what adult people 'in the street' thought about the Peace People. This was six or so months after the much publicised '*First Tuesday*' television programme on the Peace People, a month after their 10th anniversary celebrations (which no one interviewed referred to), and the day after Mairead Corrigan Maguire had been on television with *The 'A Million Minutes For Peace'* vigil outside the City Hall organised by the Peace People (this was part of an international peace campaign).

No attempt was made to scientifically balance the sample though I did mentally try to get as far as possible a balance of male/female, young/old, working class/middle class responses. Almost half of those asked refused to comment, with many buses to catch and places of work to be returned to (genuine reasons in a few cases no doubt but I presume usually an excuse to say nothing).

Perhaps the most quotable quote from the whole exercise was from a man in his fifties who, in declining to comment, made the following remark – *"I've nothin' to do with para-militaries, peace or nothin'."* This seemed to sum up so well the 'a plague on all your houses', perhaps also heads in the sand, attitude of many Northern Ireland people.

Of the 50 people who commented, 31 (or 62%) made some favourable comments in general about the Peace People past or present (17 of these also made negative comments). Most of the favourable comments (20) could be clearly identified as referring to the Peace People in the past, when they were in the limelight; these were usually that they started off well, were good at the time in bringing Catholics and Protestants together. One woman who said they were doing a good job also commented that Northern Ireland was the only country in the world where the minority could rule the majority, and she could thereby be identified as a fairly staunch loyalist.

22 people (or 44%) made negative comments regarding the past or present. 7 specifically mentioned the Nobel prize and money as being problematic and a cause in the Peace People's decline. One man said *"after they got the Nobel prize that blew it."* Another man said that *the "woman who went to America seemed to get a brave handshake out of it."* A few people mentioned the differences between Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, and a couple of these said they saw Mairead Corrigan as being the more sincere (because of Betty Williams taking the money and Mairead Corrigan still working in the North). A few also mentioned international travel as a problem – feeling they should have stayed in the North. A retired businessman saw them as being infiltrated by left-wingers, communists and the IRA!

A couple of people did not blame them for the decline in numbers, saying they didn't get enough support or that there were differing ideas on what peace meant. 4 people were from outside Belfast and 3 of these felt therefore less inclined to comment – seeing the Peace People as being a Belfast organisation. 4 people mentioned seeing Mairead Corrigan on the television the day previously, and one referred back to the '*First Tuesday*' programme (though it is fair to infer from people's knowledge that a number more would have seen this).

One person had never heard of the Peace People. A few more checked that it was the organisation associated with Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan that I was talking about before commenting. Only one other personality was mentioned as being involved (Ciaran McKeown) and only by one person.

One woman had been briefly involved from the Antrim Road area; *"I went on three marches but I couldn't see that it was doing any good. We made our protest, and it wasn't helping matters anyhow. It brought both Catholic and Protestant people together in harmony."* The same woman was also briefly involved in a local Peace People group which fell away but some community initiatives did arise out of it.

A few people did seem to confuse the Peace People with the peace and disarmament movement internationally. Three people identified 'them' as having gone abroad (others knew about Betty Williams being in America) – these seemed to identify the Peace People as being in America or England!

15 people said specifically that they didn't know much about the Peace People – though they may then have gone on to make comments from what they felt they did know. One woman felt they didn't have the credibility because it had been mainly a women's organisation and men laughed at them (her boyfriend or husband disagreed). There was a certain telescoping of events in one man's comments who identified the Peace People as having been responsible for a cease-fire at the time.

What is most interesting in all these figures is the high proportion of people interviewed who made at least some favourable comments about the Peace People. And while some of the people who declined to comment and walked on might be in the 'never heard of them' category, only 1 person out of 50 saying they had never heard of them shows a very high awareness rate (no surprise there) of the existence of such a voluntary group.

What is also interesting is that of the 22 people making comments which could be construed as negative, 17 of these had also made positive comments. Put the other way around, of the 31 people making positive comments, 17 of these also made negative comments (about it falling away, dividing over money etc.). So only 5 people made totally negative comments.

Southern Movement for Peace⁷⁰

The Southern Movement for Peace (SMP) was set up at a meeting in Athlone organised by Athlone and Killaloe groups on 22nd September 1976; 100 representatives from more than 20 towns attended.⁷¹ It arose out of a desire for peace in the North by people in the Republic and an expression of solidarity with the Peace People. There had been a spontaneous upsurge in the Republic, with marches and groups all over the place, and this marked an attempt to set up an umbrella structure for them all. As it settled down there was a maximum of 15 groups involved.

Some of the groups in the SMP existed prior to the Peace People, including Glencree, Cork Peace Council, and the Athlone group. Ursula O'Neill had set up the Athlone group in February 1976 following the murder within two days of 5 Catholics and 10 Protestants in south Armagh that January. She said she "could stand it no longer" and sent circulars around the town, formed a committee, and then organised a strong petition directed at the IRA urging them to stop and making clear they weren't acting on their behalf. The petition was handed in to Kevin Street Sinn Fein with 7,000 signatures which had been gathered in Athlone without any door-to-door visits.

Contact with the Peace People was firmly established after a SMP contingent came to the Falls rally on 23rd October. Subsequently there was a meeting at the Mansion House, Dublin, attended by Betty Williams, Mairead Corrigan and Ciaran McKeown. Other big meetings were held at the RDS. Eleanor Wicklow was involved in getting pledges for peace from 32 women's organisations in the South.

The SMP organised its own series of meetings in the autumn of 1976. A leaflet produced by the 'Northern and Southern Movements for Peace' claimed 500,000 had marched for peace in 100 towns North and South; the map shows 72 towns in the Republic and 28 in the North where marches took place. I would have thought the ½ million estimate was rather an overstatement but it would certainly have been a couple of hundred thousand.

It was fairly clear more marched in the Republic than in the North. Why? There was a mixture of reasons – predominantly perhaps an emotional rejection of violence, but for others a genuine concern for peace, and for many an embarrassed rejection of what was perhaps being done in their name by military republicans in the North. But if more marched in the Republic than in the North there was less that people south of the border could do 'for peace' that was obvious to them; many of the short lived peace groups in the Republic foundered, I would presume, on just such a rock.

I think it is fair to say that the SMP focussed primarily on violence emanating from the IRA; this may be explicable partly in terms of the IRA being identified as for an all-Ireland republic and as Catholic in the origin of its members. Supporters of the IRA existed in the Republic whereas supporters of the Protestant paramilitaries did not. Some members of the SMP favoured a more militant picketing policy against Sinn Fein and the IRA.

However, with the SMP having become the Southern ally of the Peace People in the North, disillusionment set in when things went wrong with the Peace People. The episode of the Nobel money being kept was of considerable embarrassment, but the simple realisation that the Peace People were not going to 'bring peace' to the North probably had as much an effect, coupled with a sense of being at one remove from the conflict.

The SMP was also limited in the activities which it or its member groups undertook to things like holidays for children from the North, keeping in contact with people there, and bringing the peace issue to people's attention. It hadn't money to do a lot. As 1977 progressed things in the SMP began to slow down and numbers declined.

Brendan O'Regan and some others on the Central Steering Committee of the SMP had a think tank to see what to do next; they felt money was needed for practical and co-operative projects. They set up a committee entitled 'Peace – the role of the South' which produced a pamphlet of the same name. The canvassed voluntary organisations, big businesses and others and then organised a joint North-South meeting at the Burlington Hotel, Dublin on 23rd June 1978, attended by 300 people; this set up Co-operation North [now Co-operation Ireland – Web Editor].

To quote *Co-operation North News* it was set up "to encourage increased trade and industry and to improve social and cultural links between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland." And as explained above, Co-operation North grew directly out of the SMP.

⁷⁰ In writing this piece on the SMP I had contact with Ursula O'Neill, Christabel Bielenberg, Stella Jacob (who has since died), and Dorothy Cantrell.

⁷¹ Irish Times, 23rd September 1976

But while some individuals and a few groups in the SMP continued to be active, the SMP effectively ceased to function by the time Co-operation North was founded in 1978 (although the SMP was never formally wound up).

Apart from Glencree and Cork Peace Council, both of which existed prior to the SMP, there is perhaps only one former SMP group still existing, and that is Waterford Peace Group. It was formed in April 1977 and has continued to be active since then. It has been involved in various political, social and support ventures in the decade since including holidays for children and families from the North, objecting to the aggressive words of the Irish national anthem, planting peace trees, a float in the St Patrick's day parade, and a campaign against war toy displays in local shops. They had visits from Mairead Corrigan in 1977 and Ciaran McKeown in 1978. It is fair to say the group has benefited from the contribution of Quakers in the area, although the group is a mixed one. It still keeps in touch with, and supports, the Peace People.

Right Of Reply

The Peace People reply:

We made a lot of mistakes. Indeed there are many more than those listed by Rob. Yet, if we all thought that peace would come as a result of the movement in '76, we were all wrong; we, in arrogance for thinking we could bring peace to all, and all of us for thinking peace could be brought. In truth, we must all take steps towards peace. We must commit ourselves to a process, not an end result. Every-one needs to make a conscious decision to strive to remove violence from their lives and accept the equal rights of all: peace with justice; until this day comes, we are all of us banging our heads against a wall.

Today those who criticise us more often than not, are those who know little of our work. What is it that we do? Rob talked a good deal about our activities, there are others which are not covered. In short though, we try to address the problems in Northern Ireland constructively.

Reading into it you would sense the frustration we feel in our discussions with the government on matters of justice. We lobby for change in the injustice we see, and yet reforms are not forthcoming. Still, we refuse to use violence to force the changes. We press on.

You can sense our frustration with paramilitary violence. Asking people to stop killing others, to treat their neighbours as they would wish to be treated, to rid the fears, insecurities, and bigotry from all our hearts. These are timeless calls that receive no answer. We keep trying.

You can glimpse at the work of our youth camps – 180 people this year to six countries – see it as seed planting for the next generation and the generation after. If because of their camp experience, one person refuses 'to get involved', if one person sees a new perspective or understands another's point of view, if one person makes a friend they never would have made otherwise, then all the energy and effort and resources to run these camps is worth it. We plant these seeds.

You might even, if you listen, hear the remarks we still receive while out selling the paper '*Peace by Peace*': 'what did you do with all the money?' Media perceptions are still strong after all these years. This pamphlet does enough to explain the monies and media. Our accounts, as our intentions, are open for all to see. We ask people to learn about us.

We were quite pleased to see Rob's inclusion of the remembrances of several past and present Peace People and particularly those of local groups. It is good to read their thoughts both positive and negative. We would only point to the thousands of others who have come into contact with our work: their experiences in the rallies, their enlightenment as to the many others who want peace. These 'Peace People experiences' are countless and difficult to chronicle. It should be remembered however that the nature of this pamphlet is that it gives the personal views of those interviewed. It follows on that there will be differences and other interpretations of the events and indeed 'facts'. However there is little point in directly challenging individual examples of this.

On the question of the Trust's revolving fund, by design it could have worked. If each block of money had been administered as directed, then each would have returned in full to the Trust after its use in the community. Thus the fund could have continued indefinitely. The fault lay not in the design but in the administration and conditions of repayment.

As to the issue of the hierarchical structure of the early years, we feel Rob has missed a crucial point. The problem was one of developing an incoherent mass movement of rallies into a dynamic structure capable of moving confidently into community politics and the affairs of government: a big task! The rallies were the fruit of decisions made straight from the loud-speaker. There was neither committee nor democracy. The community politics would be just the opposite extreme, pure democracy. To move from the former to the latter, hierarchy needed to be dissolved, democracy created. Ciaran's intention was to facilitate this, not to cement the triumvirate's leadership.

Their (Mairead, Ciaran, Betty) resignation from the Executive in October of 1978 was specifically to encourage the democratic tendencies. There was considerable hostility to this move. Rob does not refer to it. It is the case however that the efforts to change were unsuccessful and more could have been done. Our Executive now has a rotating chairperson and our farm project operates through a non-hierarchical consensus decision making process.

In conclusion, we are pleased with this account of our history; it is critical but generally fair, positive, but not sensationalist. Perhaps the key to a smooth running movement is good communication. A recurring theme in the pamphlet is the lack of such communication. A further problem may have been particular commitments to goals rather than to the process of

nonviolent peacemaking. We are continuing to learn to grow. Hopefully, it will give people still bent on criticism and the raising of old wounds a chance to see us in a new light.

For us the priority must be the future: if we have hurt we apologise. We have tried. In this we have not failed; for it is only in not trying that there is failure. We will continue to try and invite others to join us, continue in their own efforts or start something themselves.

Bob Rodwell writes:

As the journalist to whom Mairead Maguire refers on page 40 [of the original text but p.62 of this web edition – Ed], I welcome her assurance that she is now satisfied I did not ‘act out of malice and did not intend in any way to sabotage the work of the Peace People.’ I am distressed, however, that after the lapse of more than seven years, she revives the discredited allegation that my reports of the 1980 split were inaccurate, unchecked and partial, and I stand by them today.

Perhaps deliberately, Mrs Maguire omits to mention that I am myself a former member of the Peace People Executive, not long off that body when the reports were written, and from my involvement had, perhaps, closer knowledge of its internal workings, and better contacts than any other member of the press.

For the record, I did not ‘*sue the four spokespersons and the Peace People*’ as Mrs Maguire asserts. I merely asked the four people concerned to withdraw a deliberate, considered and potentially damaging assault on my professional reputation or I would consider further action.

My letter to Ciaran McKeown, to which you refer on page 45, [p.71, web edition] was in fact written to express the virtually unanimous view of a meeting of about three dozen people, the rumps of the Belmont, Ballyhackamore and other groups and including some Executive members, about the disastrous effect of the policy which Mr McKeown was so arrogantly and heedlessly following. Mr McKeown has never chosen to recognise this fact Th– referring to ‘*Mr Rodwell’s views*’ in his well written but thoroughly scurrilous and withdrawn book, ‘*The Passion of Peace*’ – and this made his suppression of the letter even more unacceptable and unethical.

I would demur over your description of the politics expressed in that letter as ‘conservative’ – with either a big or little C.

- *The following replies were published with Dawn Train 6 but relate to "The Peace People Experience";*

Garreth Byrne writes:

I've read your well researched pamphlet on the Peace People experience and am impressed. Interviews with Helen Senior, Margaret Watson, Mairead Corrigan and Peter McLachlan were most interesting. Also very interesting to learn that the PP never got millions, only about £665,000 in the years up to 1986. The section on local groups was the saddest part of the pamphlet. There was a real gap in thinking and acting between the high profile Executive leaders and the grass roots members.

Since I'm interested in Third World development I was glad to learn that PP groups and individuals were and still are active in fundraising for overseas development projects. From this perspective I was disappointed that you didn't mention in the Further Reading section a very interesting consideration of the PP experience relationship with some overseas donors in Holland and elsewhere by the Belfast journalist Alf McCreary in the long introduction to his account of third world development agencies entitled "*Up with People*". He compares the damaging influence some overseas aid, both governmental and private (NGO), can have on Third World development dynamics, with the damaging influence some overseas granting organisations had on the inner workings of the Peace People during the early years.

Una O'Higgins O'Malley writes:

It may be still too soon for proper evaluation of “the Peace People” in their early, public phase. But the invitation from Dawn prompts me to put down what seems to me inescapable reasons why that inspiring and courageous movement bore within it, almost from its inception, the seeds of its own destruction (I intend no disrespect to the continuing but much more low-key work of today's Peace People).

Two factors mitigated strongly against the progress of the movement set up by the gallant Mairead and Betty. Firstly, the massive support for their efforts shown right across N. Ireland was essentially and almost exclusively by support for non-violence and for non-violence alone. This support came, across the board, from brave women who were prepared to do their

utmost to ensure, in solidarity with each other, that there was no violence in their area – but there was no consensus, no agreement, about the causes of the conflict or about anything to do with the politics of the situation. Consequently the movement, in my view, should have continued for much, much longer to be simply (and splendidly) women against violence – no more.

Secondly, it seems to me incredible that it appeared possible to the then leaders to sustain such a movement without clear Protestant partnership in the leadership. That three Roman Catholics could retain the trust of a vast interdenominational following was, I suggest, expecting the impossible in today's Northern Ireland.

The Protestant community needed to see two of their women on the platforms side by side with Betty and Mairead. The importance of that factor was brought home to me conclusively at meeting after meeting in East Belfast, when I attempted to mediate the collapse of trust which women in that area experienced vis-a-vis the Peace People.

A movement simply for non-violence led by "ordinary" women from both communities had a chance for success at that time which has not since reappeared. To insert into it political theories was a serious mistake but more serious still was the lack of combined Catholic/Protestant leadership. The personal courage and charisma of Mairead and Betty was dazzling, the virtual disintegration of their heroic efforts the more disappointing.

Mairead Maguire writes:

I would like to reply to Bob Rodwell's piece on page 48 [of original edition. p.79 of this web edition -Ed] of *'The Peace People Experience'* and make one other comment.

In paragraph 1, Bob Rodwell refers to my reviving the discredited allegation. The only occasion when the allegation that Bob Rodwell's reports of the February 10th, 1980, Peace People meeting, was discredited, was when the Peace People themselves issued a statement in an "out-of-court" settlement withdrawing the allegation. However, the Peace People's own Minutes unanimously recorded that this "out-of-court" settlement statement was itself inaccurate. The whole point of my October, 1986, statement to the Assembly of the Peace People, reiterated in "The Peace People Experience" by Rob Fairmichael, was to set the record straight. In short I stand over our original statement that Bob Rodwell's reports were inaccurate, unchecked and partial and I do not see how after 7 years Bob Rodwell can stand by them.

In paragraph 2, Bob Rodwell objects to my omitting to mention his membership of the Peace People Executive. In 1980 he objected to the Peace People mentioning his then recent involvement on the Executive on the grounds that it tended to reinforce the impression of partiality. It seems that he wishes to be known as a person who was completely impartial and at the same time as a person deeply involved and with very strong and partial views on the future of the Peace People.

Paragraph 3 concerns the litigation which went on from February to October, 1980, and referred to throughout as Rodwell - v- Peace People. Bob Rodwell did indeed issue a High Court Writ of Summons against the four Peace People spokespersons - Joe Johnston, Ciaran McKeown, Alan Senior and Mairead Corrigan. It was only in order to settle this distracting litigation that the Executive finally agreed to accept Solicitor's advice to issue a statement, which they themselves unanimously agreed was inaccurate. It is again the point of my October, 1986, statement that we would have been better to turn up in Court and meet the consequences of Bob Rodwell's suit, than 'wrap the matter up' with a knowingly inaccurate statement.

Regarding paragraph 4, Bob Rodwell's letter to Ciaran McKeown made no reference whatever to the views of anyone at a meeting in East Belfast. No names or groups were mentioned in the letter signed by him. It did reiterate at length Bob Rodwell's views which had been rejected by an overwhelming majority at a Peace People Assembly in 1978. Bob Rodwell takes this latest opportunity to refer to the Peace People policy, agreed by a majority of 2 - 1, as "the policy which Mr McKeown was so arrogantly and heedlessly following". Ciaran McKeown was in fact, consistently following the majority Peace People policy – as were to the best of our private and public knowledge, Peter McLachlan and Betty Williams.

This again underlines a point of simple historical fact that Bob Rodwell somehow finds unable to accept. The Peace People did not split over the 'H' Block issues and any story to that effect was 'inaccurate'. When Ciaran McKeown refers to Bob Rodwell's views, he is referring to Bob Rodwell's views as written at length in his letter, and as earlier rejected by Peace People Assembly.

Bob Rodwell refers to 'McKeown's withdrawn book'. The tragedy is that Ciaran McKeown's book was withdrawn only because the publishers were forced by another Bob Rodwell litigation to take account of the Peace People's inaccurate statement in October, 1980, which sadly the Peace People have yet to repudiate.

Finally, Rob Fairmichael makes reference (page 45, paragraph 4) [p.70 of this web edition –Ed] to the way in which 'Peace by Peace' dealt with the 1980 'split'. The reasons the facts were not given at the time were: Ciaran McKeown was party to the Executive's decision to maintain confidentiality and in fact had proposed that motion. The Executive took this decision to remain silent because it was such a difficult matter, involving people so personally. Ciaran McKeown could not have used his privileged position as Editor of 'Peace by Peace' to print the story.

Barbara Armstrong writes:

In your pamphlet, I find that you have been 'all in all' extremely fair, in what must have been a most difficult task.

I find it very sad that Betty did not reply to you, as it makes it somewhat incomplete (to me personally at least) as without her example, I myself might not have had the "Experience of the Peace People". I can understand that there are many reasons why she might not have wanted to.

I don't think she would be offended if you included her (*in absentia*) as you did the others, entitled perhaps 'What Betty Would Have Said.' Surely what she has been, done, and her contributions to 'Peace by Peace' warrant this.

Another thing, some of us heard in the Peace People that the girls had been told originally at top level to keep the Nobel Peace Prize monies and there was talk about building something on the peace-line. I find Mairead's explanation for keeping the money remarkable, as do others. This is the woman who was strong enough to tell us to get up off our asses and get on with the work, i.e. to face S.F. I feel in the long run we are all responsible for our actions, and must not lay our decisions at another's doorstep.

I had never heard of the Finaghy Peace Person who paid the supreme price for peace, so much for "lest we forget" and "a continuing warning"!!! (plaque needed). Neither did I know that lovely Sadie Patterson had been hurt physically.

The first Youth for Peace were marvellous, front line troops. They were not appreciated enough by us all selling 'Peace by Peace' – then in pubs, like the Sally Annies, was great fun.

Our Peace People children were taken everywhere we went. This was very dangerous, in fact a lot of work was dangerous – not enough emphasis on this, I think.

Regarding Lifeline, please include "innocent victims of violence" who had no military, or para-military involvement. There were quite a few of these murdered and maimed. We did not condone the bad apples in the security forces. We found the victims in general to be most forgiving, and to expect 'the lion to lie down with the lamb' was a bit premature, but we hoped someday...that forgiveness and repentance would prevail.

Now, I wish the Peace People well. I feel nowadays they appear like a branch of CND. Nothing wrong in that but yesterday I think we had something more. Of course I'm biased, but truthful I hope. I have told you that we loved our fellow men outside the movement, but not enough inside. This happens in so many groupings. Suffice to say, like Margaret Watson, I'm glad I didn't miss my Peace People Experience.

Christabel Bielenberg writes:

Thank you so much for sending me a pre-publication copy of the Peace People Experience which I found not only most interesting but also as objective as was possible under the circumstances.

Before going into any detail, I let you know that I was not a member of the Peace People Executive and never attended one of their meetings, any reports coming from that direction therefore would be reliable hearsay. I did attend all of their Assembly meetings however as a Council member of the Southern Movement for Peace which was founded by Brendan O'Regan (now President of Co-operation North) as a sister organisation to the Peace People.

I would stress here that the Peace People as seen from the Norwegian & German viewpoint was always considered to be a women's movement founded and led by the two charismatic figures of Mairead and Betty.

The appearance of Ciaran McKeown on the scene definitely confused the issue, and my explanation that the women probably needed a representative from the media to help them deal with the publicity surrounding the movement, was not made easier by McKeown's obvious ambition not to remain an adviser in the background, but to be well up front, even so far as to consider himself as a Co-Founder of the Movement.

Due to the fact that smaller donations sent to Belfast direct were not receiving thanks or acknowledgements (doubtless due to understaffing) and also as a result of an extremely successful tour made by Betty and Mairead in Germany, I was approached by Hamburg friends with a view to founding a channel whereby funds could be passed on to the Peace People direct and could hopefully be assured of acknowledgement. The *Verein fur Frieden und Verstaendigung* was then founded for this purpose; our Board members including an eminent banker Eric Warburg and the wife of the Economics Minister for Schleswig Holstein, Daniela Westphal.

After very successful North-South collaboration in a prestigious exhibition '*Du und Deine Welt*' and a further tour of various German towns and business organisations undertaken by Betty, and promoted by the Verein, when I acted as interpreter, it became clear that much larger sums would be forthcoming if the Verein became registered as a Charitable Trust. The establishment of such a Trust would take some time, as the laws governing such Trusts in Germany are rigid, needing assurance that monies donated could only be used for certain educational or social projects.

I was asked by the Board to be responsible for this being the case, and was confident that I could take on this task as an old and valued friend, Peter McLachlan, had agreed to become Projects Manager, and another reliable and respected figure, Jim Galway, was Treasurer to the Peace People.

In the meanwhile certain disagreements and resignations from within the Peace People's Executive were causing questions to be asked which I found hard to answer. Journeyings by McKeown to Israel and Czechoslovakia, a plan of his to found a Peace University in Achill Island, hints in the Peace People newspaper '*Peace by Peace*', of which McKeown was editor, that an entrance into the political field was contemplated, etc.

On examination of the Peace People's accounts shown to me by Jim Galway, a further question arose as it seemed that the monies donated to Mairead and Betty by the Norwegians (Peace Prize) had been transferred by them to Belfast and placed in a Charitable Trust. Some three weeks later all these monies had been transferred to a Company, Peace by Peace, and McKeown had been appointed Chairman of both Trust and Company.

I have only glanced through McKeown's book '*Passion for Peace*' and must therefore take it that some explanation for this arrangement must be revealed in it, but there is no doubt that under laws governing a German Charitable Trust such manoeuvres would be an impossibility.

Be that as it may from the Verein's point of view the fact that the newly founded company was called Peace by Peace could only indicate that the financing of McKeown's newspaper in which they had no interest whatsoever was included in the deal, and the fact that it lacked advertisements could only mean that it must constitute a considerable drain on P. People's resources. This, added to the strict rules now governing the Verein which had succeeded in being established as a Charitable Trust, was enough for Eric Warburg to approach my husband Peter on a visit to Hamburg & ask him point blank could I still guarantee that all monies which were now becoming considerable would be certain to reach the required goals. My husband replied that under the circumstances he could not do so, & it was decided that other outlets such as Lagan College should be found and financed, which has since taken place.

There would be two minor points which, I feel should be clarified as from what I could gather from McKeown's account of the occasion, I would consider it not only slanted but incorrect. When Betty informed the Executive that the German fund would undertake to finance Peter McLachlan's salary, she was correct in doing so. The importance of Peter's continued involvement with the Peace People was considered all important by the Verein who knew him and trusted him. When rumour reached Germany that there was a chance of his being sacked due to lack of funds, the sum of £2,000 was offered immediately in order to carry things over for him for a short period. I later confirmed with the Verein that they would have been willing to provide further finance for Peter if need be and this was doubtless the contents of the telephone call mentioned by Betty, & which came from Eric Warburg.

To conclude, it is not easy to read extracts from a book written about such a wonderful experience as was the Peace People's by someone who with undoubted journalistic talent seems to waste so much time blaming everyone but himself for its disintegration and shows so little appreciation for other help received.

Perhaps it is therefore better to ignore the details (the a's and the z's) and to remember that Mairead's and Betty's spark has perhaps been dimmed but not extinguished, for in my experience so many smaller flames which were lit by them seem to be glowing still.

ENDS

