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Welcome to our second issue of Honk.

First of all, many thanks to every one who sent encouraging and positive comments about our first edition of Honk. Thank you, also, to everyone who has sent in articles for this issue. We had too many to print this time so if you don't see your contribution here we hope to print it soon.

The theme for this issue is “How my Light Group got started”. For those of you who do not yet have a local group, and as a resource for those of you who do, we have printed the guidance for Light groups from the website.

We also have three articles about how local groups came to be started and how they run, plus two pieces written after practising Experiment with Light.

Many people have noticed a similarity between Experiment with Light and other practices, Christian or otherwise. In a future issue we hope to focus on some of these connections. We already have articles describing such connections but more will be very welcome.

It has been exciting to read the articles in this newsletter as it confirms for me that many others feel the strength and power of this practice, and I look forward to meeting other friends involved with Experiment with Light at one of the regional gatherings or the international conference advertised at the end of the newsletter.

I must thank my son, Christopher, for helping me put this newsletter together. All he asked in return was to be acknowledged here! And I must, of course thank Susie Tombs, who has helped me put this issue together and provided the lovely photos, and Helen Meads, for the final read-through.

**Barbara Childs**

Contributions for future issues are very welcome on any (relevant!) topic. We are particularly looking for your ideas on how this newsletter, or anything else, can support Light practitioners.

Contributions to: [experimentwithlight@gmail.com](mailto:experimentwithlight@gmail.com) Deadline for next issue: April 4th

*“create* the **space** where the  
**miracle** can happen”

On the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent eleven years ago, in an atmosphere of expectant waiting our Light Groups ignited and we have blazed, spluttered and sparkled continuously ever since! - ebbing and flowing over the years from five to two groups.



We had been very fortunate to have just had Rex Ambler lead a wonderful Monthly Meeting residential weekend, when he set The Experiment with Light in its historical context and led us in the practice. A couple of us in Bury St. Edmunds Local Meeting were inspired and after Meeting for Worship invited Friends to participate in a meditation, to discuss the practical guidelines for setting up groups that Rex had given

us and to see if Light Groups were to ignite in our meeting. At that first meeting three groups formed with individuals offered their homes as venues - we were alight!

In retrospect the crucial ingredients were firstly that having arisen from a Monthly Meeting residential, we had Elders involved from the beginning who understood the process and recognised its potential for deepening the Spirit; they were clear that it was not a therapeutic process. The second ingredient was the safe structure offered by these guidelines:

- Groups meeting at a mutually convenient time and place between two to six weeks in frequency.
- The period of Silence after the six steps of the meditation, allowing the individual to ground and contain themselves before sharing with others
- Confidentiality within the groups
- That “couples” are not in the same Light group, thus removing a potentially difficult dynamic.
- That the individual takes total responsibility for their involvement in the group and the depth to which they choose to go.
- That the sharing group members are purely witnesses to another’s sharing.

Adherence to these guidelines, as Henri Nouwen\* so beautifully puts it, enables groups to “create the space where the miracle can happen.”

It was about one year into our history that we began to splutter, a wind blew both internally and externally. Sitting alongside someone in emotional and spiritual pain is extremely difficult; the desire to rescue the sufferer is strong and we became aware that in one Light group, solutions were being offered to the participant and the anxiety was such that the concern was being shared beyond the group, albeit with the individual’s consent. In Light Groups we are given the privilege of witnessing someone’s unique spiritual journey. Distressing though this may be, it is not our role to try to “mend” a spiritual experience - the Light/ the Divine is not broken. However, that is not to say that at times as humans we can be very vulnerable and on the edge of becoming mentally unwell. Then Light Groups may not be helpful and the individual needs to feel free to withdraw from their group with no sense of failure or of letting others down, to

seek more appropriate support. The external wind that caused us to splutter was one vocal Elder's fear that Light Groups were both exclusive and distracting members from Meeting for Worship. These were complex and serious concerns which we discerned might be tackled by Open Light Groups - clearly if they were to survive, the Light Groups needed tending.

Tending the Light has now become a regular part of the life of our Local Meeting. Every six months at varying times, to enable accessibility, we hold an "Open Light Group" to which all are welcome. After a brief introduction for newcomers, all present take part in a meditation, new members being placed in groups with established sparklers. This is also a time when members can leave, join or indeed swap groups. To ensure some continuity we ask participants to aim for a six month commitment to a group. Through Open Light Groups it seems that fears can be talked about and allayed and the process becomes clear, inclusive and flexible.

I have shared some of our practical experiences but the wick to the whole process is *trust the Light* and as George Fox said: "your teacher is within you, look not forth". Many of us will testify to what we have gained personally from the Experiment with Light. For our Local Meeting, during a period of troubles and threshing, Light Groups helped to form a grassroots matrix holding us beyond the discord of words and linking us through that which is eternal.

Wishing you a peaceful New Year and may your Light Groups sparkle!

**Mary Pennock**

Footnote:\*Henri Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic Priest who in his writing talked about the boundaries necessary to create a space within which the spirit can move.

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Editors' note: Bury St Edmunds is thought to be the longest continuously practising Light group. Rex did many introductory workshops when his work began in the late 1990s; now that others are trained to take that role, he has retired from this work.

## How my Light Group got started



Somehow it didn't go deep enough. I thought it was great, it ticked a lot of boxes for me, but somehow, in some indefinable way there was something that the Quaker way, as I experienced it, wasn't addressing, some kind of depth that wasn't being plumbed. So after ten years of membership I went off to see if I could find what I was looking for elsewhere. I didn't even know quite what it was that was missing, but in my explorations away from Friends I began to realise that there could be an inner connection that was quite unmistakable, that wanted to guide and teach and facilitate growth, and that wanted the best for us. But I didn't quite find it; apart from the odd glimpse, and a sense that I wasn't quite 'getting it right' it remained rather theoretical. Returning to Quakers some seventeen years later I came across 'Light to Live By' and was impressed - was this it? A weekend at Swarthmoor followed and yes, there it was, where it had been all along but just waiting to be rediscovered: how to develop the inner relationship - blissfully simple, direct, profound, transformational. In my usual fashion I got excited! In a brief report to my meeting about my experience I found there was a similar hunger in others and it was this that led to our introductory workshop and the formation of our Light Group, now three years old.

**Ann Banks**

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“and I **saw** with *delighted* recognition that

he had been able to access a place beyond  
the everyday mind”

I came across the Experiment with Light practice through Rex Ambler's book *The Truth of the Heart*, which was circulating in our local meeting late in 2009. Then in June 2010 I went to an introductory day workshop on the Experiment, led by Catherine King Ambler and Ann Banks, and hosted by our Area Meeting (Craven and Keighley) .

In a sense, though, I had found the place where the practice comes from, more directly and in its original form, some years before. Through the first decade of this century I was drawn back among Friends (after a good Quaker education at Ackworth Friends' School forty years before) as the result of a recognition that George Fox and other early



Quakers had had an experience of spiritual terrain akin to what I had found in Buddhist traditions, especially Tibetan Buddhism.

Following a visit to Briggflatts Meeting House as I passed by in 2008 I read George Fox's journal for the first time, and I saw with delighted recognition that he had

been able to access a place beyond the everyday mind, and that he knew some of the far reaches of the spirit that I had glimpsed through Buddhist practices. To find this depth in early Quaker writings encouraged my return to a tradition which has nourished me subliminally through most of my life, but to see it with new depth of understanding, as my own capacity and vision had grown through the intervening decades.

Around the same time I had started to visit the Schoolroom at Yealand Conyers Meeting, to attend a weekly Buddhist group there, and as we circled the Schoolroom in slow walking meditation I passed, week after week, a poster-sized reproduction of a panel from the Quaker Tapestry quoting Francis Howgill: "The kingdom of heaven did gather us and catch us all as in a net. We came to know a place to stand in, and what to wait in". I was touched deeply by the realisation that I shared awareness of this "place to stand in" with those early Quakers. I felt that I was myself gathered into that net and I came back to Friends to see if I could find, in my home country and culture, what I had not been able to find here before: what a joy. Here was a knitting together of separate strands of my spiritual life, and of traditions from across the globe.

So when I found Rex's work on the Experiment with Light I was further delighted to find that he had drawn a structured practice out of the early writings, to create a form in which we could begin to practise deliberately in this way again. He has done us all a great service in revealing something which was hidden in plain sight in the early writings, but nevertheless still hidden to many of us as ideas or notions, rather than something practical and indeed experimental which we can experience directly and deeply for ourselves. The Tibetans, like the Quakers, call this kind of revelation an "opening" of the teaching of an earlier master, so that it becomes accessible once again. This opening I think Rex has done.

Following the workshop in Settle in June 2010, five of us who had attended the workshop began to meet monthly in Calf Cop Meeting House in Bentham, North Yorkshire, to practise the Light meditation. We have met there regularly, now, for perhaps fifteen months. One person had to stop coming to the group when his work patterns changed. Another person came for a while but has not been with us for a few months now. The four who remain continue to meet monthly to share a guided Light

meditation, quiet time in which to reflect, write, drink tea and wander, followed by worship sharing of our experiences in the Light.



We are open to new members, but we are not actively seeking to grow in numbers at present. The power of the practice does not seem to have much to do with the numbers attending. I find myself content to let our group grow as it will, and to trust that unfolding. This is an unusually relaxed approach for me, and I think it is testament to the depth of the process: the Experiment shows me that the Light is palpable and can be trusted!

Each of the other group members could doubtless tell a different story of our group. Some of us sometimes meet to share the meditation between our monthly meetings. I think most of us also do the practice ourselves at home. For me the group is deepening as the months pass, and it has become a very precious and intimate space, beyond what words can say. I feel that I am only at the beginning of exploring what the Experiment has to offer. In my reading of early Quakers - Fox, Fell, Howgill, Hubberthorne, the Penningtons and the Penns, Barclay,

and Woolman - I often come across descriptions of aspects of their practice which enrich my work with the Experiment, so that study and practice complement one another.

I have recently begun to experiment with allowing a broader world focus into my Light practice, and I know that this form can be adapted and used in many creative ways yet to unfold. I remember vividly the power of a group Light meditation at a Living Witness Project gathering last year, when I received insight which is still guiding new opening to the call of the world in need.

I also find that my work with the Light practices complements my continued practice in the Tibetan tradition, and that this is a wonderful form of spiritual cross training: light

refracted uniquely through different cultural traditions adding depth and perspective to the work of stabilising this way of being beyond the small self.

I am happy that our Light group allows me to share this depth of practice with members of my area meeting, and that when I sit on Sundays in my own local meeting I can feel the resonance of the Light group in our Meeting House, as leaven and inspiration.

Mary Swale

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## < LIBYA >

Torn by war, pain, suffering;

Bewildered by death, bereavement, grief;

Struggling with separation, resentment, anger, hatred;

Seeking freedom, justice, peace;

Needing wisdom, reconciliation, love;

Let there be

Oil - not from the ground, the well, the pipe,



but Oil from without, from the Spirit,

from within;



Oil to bring meeting, dialogue, conversation;

Oil to give a will to accept, to respect, to forgive;

Oil to enable a wholeness of life

for all the people of Libya.

Joan Patten.

Written during my first experience of Experiment with Light 'On the World' meditation.

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### An unexpected gift

I was so amazed by the effect the first experience had on me even when I thought it had had none, because I was totally unready for it. As we separated for our twenty minutes quiet time after the meeting I went off out in disgust, asking myself how could I expect

anything to happen if I'd wasted year after year day dreaming in meeting. I hadn't even learnt to centre down properly.



*Garden at Charney Manor*

I stomped out to walk in Charney's beautiful garden, to have some fresh air at least, and there I found myself experiencing "ordinary" things in a new way. I could walk you back now (oh sadly to only two of) those five things now. Even though the flowers will have gone I can still see their astounding beauty and that of the silver bark pattern. The flowers were two tiny rock garden ones, white but I saw they were veined with blue, with a rain or dew drop nestling in each. They were astounding. I marvelled at another rock garden plant, a flowerless succulent, two more plants now sadly forgotten, and then my attention was drawn by marvellous whorls high in the bark of a pair of silver birch trunks. After this I returned back to my original little flowers, and then repeated my four other stopping points. Time was up already and I returned to the group, comforted and glorying in this unexpected gift.

**Mary Dower**

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## Guidance for Light groups

These recommendations are based on the experience of a wide range of Light groups and are for support those setting up and running Light groups. They are on the website.

### **Workshops**

Experience suggests that a Light group is more likely to be successfully sustained if a core group of Friends from the Meeting (or Area Meeting, if it is to be an Area Meeting group) have experienced a workshop together. If you would like to arrange a workshop,

please contact potential facilitators through the website: [www.experiment-with-light.org.uk](http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk) or email [experimentwithlight@gmail.com](mailto:experimentwithlight@gmail.com)

### **Relationship with Meeting(s)**

Friends not immediately drawn to the Light Group may feel excluded once it is set up. They may even perceive it as divisive, so it is wise to bring the idea to the Meeting as a whole at the very beginning, or at least to consult Elders. This enables any misunderstandings about Experiment with Light to be dealt with, and to hear the objections of any Friend who is opposed (which might particularly be the case if the Light group is 'closed' - see below). Where the establishment of the group has not been before the whole Meeting (and even where there has been Elders' support but no business meeting minute) sometimes conflict has arisen.

When a Light group runs with Meeting's minuted agreement, the spiritual life of the Meeting is enriched. This also can apply when the Light group's existence is welcomed after resolution of initial conflict (which is the usual outcome when and if that happens - usually recorded in a minute). This would be expected when the spiritual lives of the Friends in that Meeting are enriched. It is also recommended that the Light group reports to its Meeting periodically.

### **Things to consider and decide**

Consider as a group what feels helpful for you as a group. Remember you can review and change as you go along. It is helpful once you have agreed how you feel you would like to run as a group, you also agree a date or point in the future when you will meet to discuss how you each feel it is going.

### **The group to agree its protocol**

Members will need time to learn to trust each other and feel that they are not being judged, so the strong recommendation is to conduct the worship- sharing under the discipline of Quaker Faith and Practice 12.21 (4th and 5<sup>th</sup> paragraphs especially):

- speaking only from one's own experience in the meditation,
- listening with attention,
- absolute confidentiality, and

- no commenting on what anyone says in the worship sharing session.

Experience suggests that when Friends do comment directly on another's sharing, it stops the process for the person who is sharing. It is helpful to allow space between contributions, allowing them to arise out of and fall back into silence. Asking for clarification of anything that is not clear after the Friend has finished sharing can be helpful, but lapsing into discussion is not.

### **Where to meet**

If at the Meeting House, the Light group may be more identified with the Meeting and seem more like a Meeting activity. If at Friends' homes, consider whether to move around rather than be reliant on one Friend. It is possible the Friend hosting may feel less able to fully participate if they feel they are providing 'hospitality'. If the idea of different venues is agreed it will require strong lines of communication with Meeting and with Friends who may for some reason miss one particular Light group meeting, so that they are not excluded inadvertently.

### **How often to meet**

This needs to be chosen sensitively, according to the situation of the members. For example twice a month means that if a Friend misses one meeting, it is not too long until the next opportunity to Experiment. Monthly may mean some members feel better able to commit to being part of the group. Every three weeks is a compromise, but can be difficult to remember. Any agreement about frequency can be regularly reviewed.

### **Regularity**

Consider whether to fix regular dates, e.g. first and third Tuesday/second and fourth Wednesday/first Thursday and third Friday (accommodates Friends with other commitments) mean that the co-ordination of diaries doesn't become complex.

### **Timing of meeting**

To meet in the day excludes some working Friends, but an evening may not suit retired or older Friends so the group needs to time its meetings according to Friends' circumstances. A Light group will usually take about two and a half or three hours (see

form of Experimenting below).

### **Closed or free-flowing group?**

Consider whether the group will be 'closed' (or 'settled'), that is, not open to newcomers once it has started Experimenting, or 'free flowing', that is open to anyone from the Local or Area Meeting. This may be something that the Meeting decides as part of the process of the Light group being established.

The advantage of a closed group is that Friends can develop very close understandings and share very deeply. The disadvantage is the appearance of exclusivity.

The advantage of a free-flowing group is that it is inclusive. The disadvantage is that when newcomers join, Friends have to spend time explaining the process. It may also be necessary to use a different version of the Experiment for newcomers (see below).

The group might decide to be closed for a period, say 12 months, then open for newcomers to join, before becoming closed again for another 12 months.

**The following Section is feedback from Light groups about what has worked well for them.**

- Consider whether responsibility for the running of the group should be shared between its members. One model is that a different Friend hosts each meeting and organises - but not necessarily makes - tea and coffee (brings ingredients etc if not provided at venue), sets room out, chooses version of Experiment, starts the process - see below 'clearing', starting CD or reading the Experiment.
- Start with Friends telling each other about their day/week/recent life: this clears what is less important from the issues which may need to be considered in the Light. If the group is large, this can be quite brief - the host invites the contributions. Could have tea with this part of the meeting. (20 mins)
- Meditation from CD/tape or read (40 mins) after this 'clearing' section.

- During the time alone in silence - walk outside, draw, write, or just sit (not reading). Some groups have tea as this starts or draws to a close. (15- 20 mins, or until everyone is back in the group and still again)
- Worship sharing (QFP12.21 4th&5th paras). How many in each sharing group depends on the size of the group. Up to 8 can work, but obviously it takes more time the more Friends there are to share. 4, 5 or 6 is ideal. 3 is ok. 2 may be too small on a regular basis. If the Light group is large, Friends can divide into smaller sharing groups, which may remain as set for all Light group meetings, or be decided on each occasion. If divided into smaller sharing groups, it is helpful to come back together for final reflection of each other's experience, silence and stillness. If there a number of sharing groups the time allocated for sharing is best agreed before the tape starts, so the full group can come together finally around the same time. Sharing in one group can be as long as it takes, bearing in mind any agreements made about how long the group meeting should normally last.
- Choose the host for the next meeting and deal with any admin matters after the practice is completed.

### **Version of the meditation**

There are several different versions of the meditation on the individual, some more 'wordy' than others. There is also a meditation on the group and a meditation on the world. As Friends Experiment longer, they tend to find they need fewer words. There is one version with only bells to mark each stage (and no words) for very experienced groups.

### **Finally...**

The main thing is to agree between you wh at you would like to do - only you know what will suit your Meeting and your Friends. The silent time alone immediately after the meditation and the way in which the worship sharing is conducted are, however, important: being too casual is likely to get in the way of the Light. **Please do feedback your experience - we'd love to hear what works for your group.**

Helen Meads, Catherine King Ambler and Rex Ambler

## Good with figures and Excel?

The EwL network **urgently** needs a treasurer to take over from Catherine King Ambler. Duties include: keeping records of income and expenditure, preparing quarterly and annual income expenditure accounts and managing the EwL network bank account with the Co-op Bank. **Familiarity with Microsoft Excel essential.**

Please contact Catherine King Ambler on 01524 701287 or at [catherinekingambler@phonecoop.coop](mailto:catherinekingambler@phonecoop.coop)

## NEWS and DATES

### 2012 Introductory workshops

10-12 Feb	Charney Manor with Diana Lampen and Susie Tombs	Tel: +44 (0)1235 868 206 <a href="mailto:charneymanor@quaker.org.uk">charneymanor@quaker.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.charneymanor.org.uk">www.charneymanor.org.uk</a>
20-22 April	Swarthmoor Hall with Ann Banks, Susie Tombs and Hilary Painter	Tel: +44 (0)1229 583 204 <a href="mailto:info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk">info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk">www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk</a>
29 June- 1 July	Claridge House with Diana Lampen, Hilary Pinder and Mary Pennock	Tel: +44 (0)845 3457281 <a href="mailto:welcome@claridgehousequaker.org.uk">welcome@claridgehousequaker.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.claridgehousequaker.org.uk">www.claridgehousequaker.org.uk</a>
6-8 July	Swarthmoor Hall with Margaret Bradshaw, Val Bone and Helen Meads	Tel: +44 (0)1229 583 204 <a href="mailto:info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk">info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk">www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk</a>
5-7 October	Glenthorne with Margaret Bradshaw, Angela Greenwood and Kayt Turner	Tel: +44 (0)15394 35389 <a href="mailto:info@glenthorne.org">info@glenthorne.org</a> <a href="http://www.glenthorne.org.uk">www.glenthorne.org.uk</a>
12 October	New Jordans with John Lampen, Mary Pennock and Hilary Pinder	Tel: +44 (0)1494 876594 <a href="mailto:office@newjordans.org">office@newjordans.org</a> <a href="http://www.newjordans.org">www.newjordans.org</a>

## 2012 training the facilitators

(For experienced Experimenters who would like to facilitate introductory events.)

14-16 September

Swarthmoor Hall  
with Rex Ambler, Catherine King  
Ambler and Helen Meads

Tel: +44 (0)1229 583 204  
[info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk](mailto:info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk)  
[www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk](http://www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk)

Please note that this year Woodbrooke will be booking the Swarthmoor courses.

### Regional gatherings

For those of you in the north of the country a regional gathering is to be held in Manchester in April.

It's to be at **Mount Street Meeting House in Manchester on Saturday 5th May**. Drinks from 10am and beginning the programme at 10.30, finishing at 4pm. Shared lunch to include soup if it's not too difficult to transport. **Booking by March 31 essential**. There will be no charge for the event but donations to the EWL Network always welcome. Contact Ann Banks or Val Bone on 01706 816662 or by email to [annbanks101@gmail.com](mailto:annbanks101@gmail.com)

We are hoping to hold a regional gathering this September or October in the south of the country. The venue is to be announced in our next issue, and will be posted on the website and facebook page as soon as it is confirmed.

## Looking ahead to 2013

### Experiment with Light International Conference

**27-29 September 2013**

Although this might seem quite a way ahead now, do make a note of this date. The conference will be held at Woodbrooke and although I have no further details at the moment I am sure it will be of great interest to everyone interested in Experiment with Light.

### Experiment with Light articles in The Friend

An informative series of articles about Experiment with Light appeared in the British weekly Quaker journal, 'The Friend' at the end of 2011. If you missed reading these they are now available on the website (under the 'resources' tab): [www.experiment-with-light.org.uk](http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk)

## Facebook page

Experiment with Light now has a Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/ExperimentwithLight>  
The page contains a brief explanation of the practice, which might be handy if you need a 'potted' explanation for inquirers. If you are on facebook, please visit and 'like' the page.

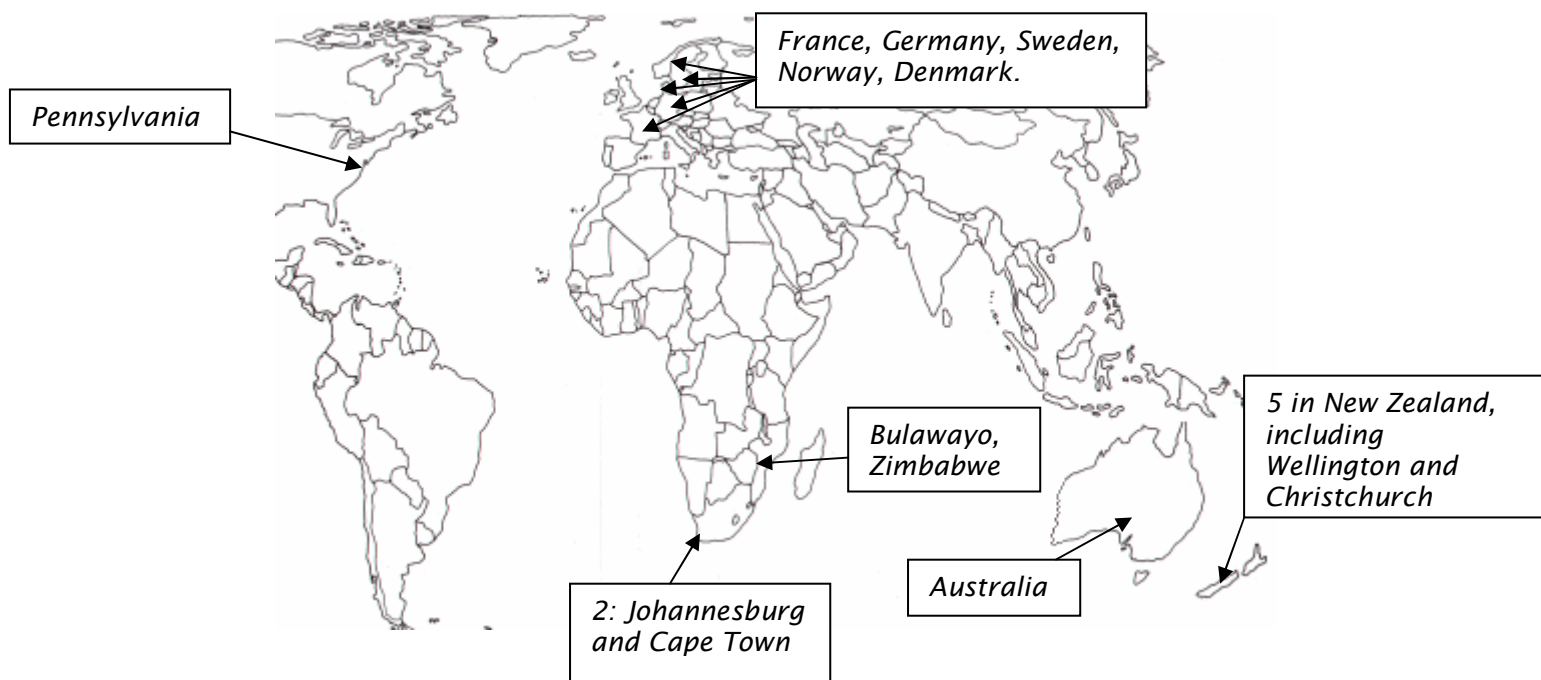
## Helen Meads' thesis

Helen Meads has just been awarded a PhD on the subject of Experiment with Light. (congratulations!) For those of you who wish to read it, it is available electronically from <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/3076/>

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## Where are the Light Groups?

Here are the approximate locations of Light Groups around the world.



These are not all checked - we do not have contact details for all of these, and of course there may be groups we do not know of. Let us know if you know of any!

Our last issue showed those in the UK and links to a more precise 'zoomable' map of locations in the UK.