

Our vision is to end torture and complicity in torture, upholding our testimony to peace and equality and working towards healing through reconciliation.

UPDATE by Chas Raws

HMT - Her Majesty's Torturers

"Torture continues to feature in the headlines" – this is becoming a standard introduction.

Q-CAT Briefing 37 referred to the cases of British abuse of Kenyan civilians in the aftermath of the Mau Mau rebellion against the colonial administration during independence. Three months later a high court judge has given a definitive judgement that survivors of these abuses have the right to sue the British government for compensation. This is after years of prevarication by successive governments, including the outrageous attempt to transfer responsibility to the Kenyan government. The victims' barrister has described this policy as "morally repugnant" yet even now, having admitted that the abuses took place, our government intends to appeal against the judgement. It must be a matter of shame that, having committed such abuses sixty years ago, our elected representatives are still trying to evade responsibility for them.

The problem is that the abuses were so widespread and the potential compensation so large, covering victims in Aden, Cyprus, Malaysia, Palestine and Northern Ireland. In Cyprus they earned our troops the title 'HMT' (Her Majesty's Torturers) from the International Red Cross.

As a result of the Q-CAT Briefing, John Lynes drew my attention to the fact that the whistle-blower in Kenya was a Quaker called Eileen Fletcher whose experience as a senior civil servant in Whitehall led to a period in Kenya. There she had direct dealings with the prison and probation system and began to complain about its cruelty and injustices. On her return to England she waged a one-woman campaign, particularly on behalf of young Kikuyu girls who had been sentenced to long terms of detention with hard labour. The government propaganda machine sought to vilify and discredit her but she enlisted the support of MPs such as Fenner Brockway, Barbara Castle and Aneurin Bevan. In a long debate in the House of Commons (Committee of the whole House) on 6th June 1956, it was Eileen Fletcher's meticulous record of dates, ages of prisoners and judicial proceedings which undermined the attempt by the Colonial Office to brush the whole matter under the carpet as statements by government ministers were shown to be untrue. So 20 years before Eric Baker's concern was recognised by Quakers another Friend was acting in our best tradition of committed activism.

Cont...

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Secret courts

An important issue which continues to threaten our justice system, particularly since the demotion of Kenneth Clarke, is the provision for judicial hearings of 'sensitive' cases in secret as embodied in the Justice and Security Bill. This uses 'closed material proceedings' instead of the present 'public interest immunity' certificate to prevent sensitive evidence from being heard in open court. What makes it more unacceptable is that, like the military tribunal system in Guantanamo Bay, not only is the evidence not revealed but the defendants and their lawyers would not be informed what case was being brought against them by the security services or the police. In spite of Nick Clegg's support, this bill was rejected by the recent Liberal Democrat conference and a coalition of human rights organisations is campaigning against it. Given recent examples of lying and cover-ups by the police it would

seem very unwise to abandon centuries of open justice in the misleading name of 'security'. One unforeseen consequence of such a system was the payment of millions of pounds as compensation or hush-money to six high-profile former Guantanamo detainees including Binyam Mohamed and Moazzam Begg whose claims that they had been 'rendered' illegally from one illegal prison camp to another could neither be denied nor investigated publicly. The final disgraceful revelation was that it would not be incumbent on the government to make it known that a trial under the provisions of closed material proceedings was about to be held or was being held or had been held – surely a black day for British justice. Remember that Chris Grayling, the new justice secretary, is on record as saying that he would like to tear up the Human Rights Act.

News of an important conference:

BRITAIN TORTURES TOO

Friday 15 and Saturday 16 February 2013 at Amnesty International UK, London

Jointly organised by the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics & Ethics, University of Brighton, and The Rendition Project, Universities of Kent and Kingston, this two-day conference for activists, academics and the public aims to explore Britain's use of torture since 1945; its complicity in torture; and what might be done to end both.

Confirmed speakers:

Huw Bennett (Aberystwyth University)
Ruth Blakeley (Rendition Project/University of Kent)
Ian Cobain (*Guardian*)
James Gaskarth (University of Plymouth)
Peter Osborne (*Daily Telegraph*)
Gareth Peirce (Birnberg Peirce)
Sam Raphael (Rendition Project/Kingston University)
Philippe Sands (University College, London)
Phil Shiner (Public Interest Lawyers)
Henry Shue (Oxford University)
Heather Widdows (University of Birmingham)

Topics include:

A brief history of British torture since the end of WWII
Britain's role in rendition
The uses and limits of the law in trying to end UK torture
The ethics of British complicity
Taking responsibility for Britain's history of torture: academics and the public
Practical campaigning against torture
The media's complicity
Lessons from the USA

The conference is open to anyone interested.

It runs from 1000 - 1800 on both days. Talks, in one-hour slots, are of about 30 mins., so as to allow as much time as possible for discussion.

Costs: £30 employed/ £15 unemployed or student

To reserve a place, please email Professor Bob Brecher: R.Brecher@brighton.ac.uk Details of registration and payment arrangements will follow.

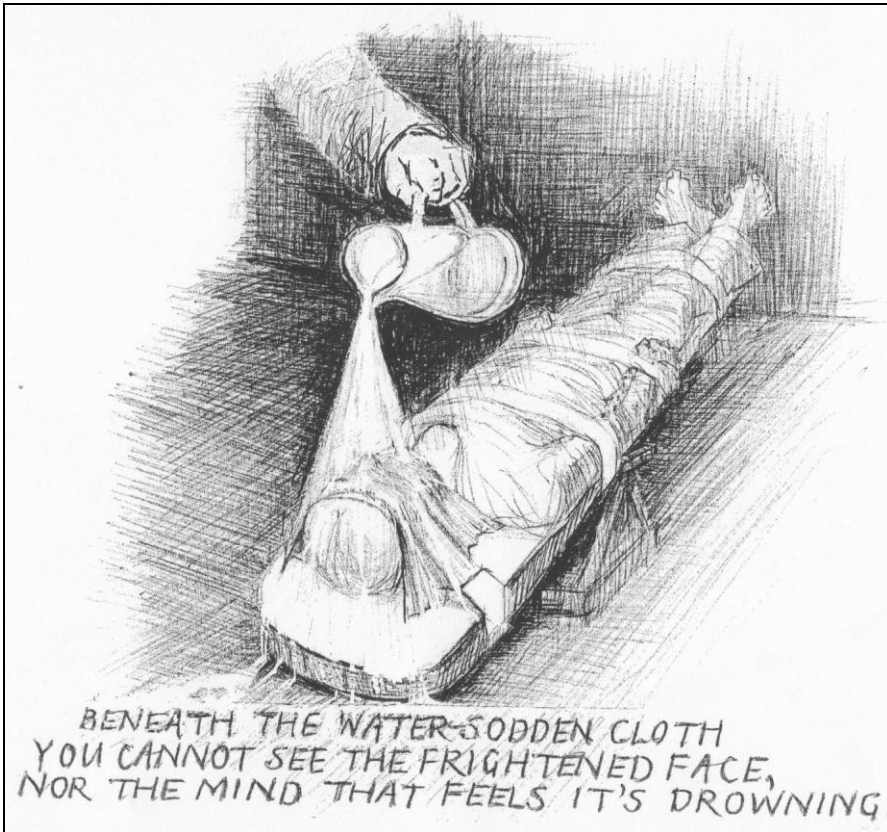


Illustration by Michael Still

Reflections on the Q-CAT Garden at the Tatton Park Show

Dori Miller

Building the Q-CAT garden felt unsafe from the word go. The construction materials (concrete, metal, and demolition rubble) were not garden friendly. Only about a third of it looked like a garden. The other two-thirds looked like a bomb site and a prison cell. It wasn't pretty. There was no guarantee that either the RHS judges or the public would like it, or 'get' it. It was a difficult build; nothing went smoothly, and it mostly rained. We were pushed for time to complete, with the lead boxes for the speakers being designed and made the evening before judging. The garden has to be ready for judging at 8am; we expected the judges about 9.30 at our site. Earlier that morning, press photographers had been round, and one of them must have opened one of the very heavy prison gates the wrong way, and it stuck – would neither open nor close. I had the RHS operations department doing SOS at 9am; they solved it by wrapping a piece of wire where a washer should have been.

That was the final panic of the build; there were at least a dozen reasons the judges could have marked us down on, but they didn't, and gave us the Gold.

Next, the visitors. Our army of volunteers, well-briefed by Tom, had various duties: to explain the concept; to point out the speakers and invite visitors to listen to them; to make the one-way system work; to allow only a few in at a time to ensure a meditative walk rather than a dash through the garden; to try to prevent people falling down the steps; to offer to look after shopping trolleys (rather than have them dragged over the plants); to give out leaflets and promotional seed packets; and to make contact with people and invite them to respond to the garden. And to provide a Quaker presence - not much to ask!

So, how did it work? There is occasionally a show garden open to entry by visitors, but we were making more demands than for a casual saunter through. Many people were willing to queue, and wanted to talk to

the volunteers. Most who went round listened to the speaker stories of political prisoners who had undergone torture, and there was respect for the garden and the theme.

Here are some visitor comments:

You should feel very proud of the number of people you have touched and made to think more deeply about human rights abuses.

Amazing how you have conveyed such a powerful message in a garden. I overheard "It makes the hairs on my arms stand on end".

I can't go in – it brings back too many memories.

Thank you. A beautiful garden and serves its purpose brilliantly.

Strangely moving – and upsetting!

People who came in the morning and found it crowded came back at the end of the day to see it and take time to understand it when there was enough quiet.

Some of my family were in concentration camps.

What a lot of outreach in one day!

Such a strong clear message and so well planted. I can see more and more the longer I stay.

I didn't come here to see gardens like this. The sound was really effective and made

the garden interactive.

Part of the garden is to be relocated at Woodbrooke for a year. The awareness raising that began at Tatton will continue, as many visitors to the Quaker Study Centre, not only Quakers, will see it. As at Tatton, there will be no insisting that anyone engage with it, but there is no doubt that it will make a statement. This is the first time Woodbrooke has hosted anything like this in its beautiful calm grounds, so they are going out on a limb. Sandra Berry, Director of Woodbrooke, welcomes the potential controversy; she calls it 'Faith in Action'.

For me, even handling the construction materials – never mind being imprisoned or tortured – made me feel anxious and depressed. High security fence posts and barbed wire have the opposite effect of plants, which provide spiritual refreshment. I grieve for those who suffer, like those in our speaker stories. I understand better what plants mean to me, and appreciate more my freedom to enjoy them. I am deeply satisfied with the Gold award, amazed at such positive visitor response at Tatton, and it has been inspiring to have had the support of so many Quakers, from our own Area Meeting and beyond.

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To the Treasurer: Juliet Morton,
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If you are a taxpayer you can increase the value of your donation to Q-CAT by 25% at no cost to you. Please complete the Gift Aid Declaration (not applicable to CAF vouchers).

I would like my donation to be treated as Gift Aid. I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer, resident in the UK for tax purposes, and that I am paying an amount of income/capital gains tax at least equal to the tax the charity claims on my donation in the relevant tax year.

Signed.....

Dated.....

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To receive newsletters by post please fill this in and send it to Jane Laxton, 79 Wellington Rd., New Brighton, Wirral CH45 2NE

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