

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

December 2019 January 2020

Dear Friends: Thank you to everyone who contributed in some way to our newsletter in 2019. You have given us such an interesting variety of articles and suggestions for extracts and quotations which somehow always seem to come together to make a coherent whole. Congratulations to two of our regular contributors, Barbara Earl and Helen Johnson, whose articles in the November edition were republished in *The Friend* (Helen) and *Into Wholeness* (Barbara).

To all of you who receive our little publication, it would be wonderful to hear from you. Your news and thoughts would most welcome.

We wish all our readers a happy Christmas season and a peaceful 2020.

Gillian Turner and David Parlett

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. *Philippians 4:6*

BC:AD

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.
This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.
This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.
And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven. *UA Fanthorpe*

Wedding Bells

We send our love and best wishes to Maddy Ward and Tom Pennington on the occasion of their wedding on 14 December. This poem is read at almost every wedding in Ireland:

Scaffolding

Masons, when they start upon a building,
Are careful to test out the scaffolding;
Make sure that planks won't slip at busy points,
Secure all ladders, tighten bolted joints.
And yet all this comes down when the job's done
Showing off walls of sure and solid stone.
So if, my dear, there sometimes seem to be
Old bridges breaking between you and me
Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall
Confident that we have built our wall. *Seamus Heaney*

Christmas greetings

As another busy year comes to a close, we would like to wish everyone a relaxing Christmas and 'be still in thy own mind'. With love, **Rachel, Josh & Livi Edgson**
Rhiannon Rees sends loving greetings for Christmas and the New Year to all Friends, far and near.

'The Light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never mastered it.'

Love and best wishes to you all in Croydon Meeting for a happy Christmas and New Year from
Mary Clarke

May the peace, love, light and life of the Christ's presence be with you and your loved ones.

Plenty love to everyone at Croydon Meeting, from **Joyce Trotman**

Seasonal wishes and greetings to everyone at Croydon Meeting -with love and best wishes from
Margaret Skelton.

Love and best wishes from Croydon meeting to

Wilf Hayler, who has weathered a difficult year with poor health.

Kitty McVey, who steps down from service as an Area Meeting trustee on London Quaker Property Trust

Marjorie Evans, always glad to see visitors

Celia Snaith, happily moved to Reading and attending her local meeting.

Tima and John Beckett, and to all our f/Friends who still keep in touch via our newsletter.

Joyce Trotman: Windrush Hero

Joyce received a special invitation as a Windrush Hero to an event on 1 December in The Classic, Upper Tooting Road. 'We are elated to inform you that you have been especially selected and nominated by members of our community of Family and Friends to join us for a special pre-Christmas Windrush Brunch and Sunday Serenade and after-party dancing.' The young people issuing the invitation were descendants of the Windrush generation who, based in Dudley, had set up a group, the Turntable Massive, to honour their elders.

The upstairs banqueting hall was elegantly decorated, the event was very well organised, and each of the Elders received a 'Special Windrush Hero' medal and a handwritten Christmas card.

The word 'brunch' does not do justice the menu, which catered for every possible taste, the serenade was sung by a Gospel Choir, and the dancing included the samba.

Joyce left at 9pm, having had a wonderful time.

She has also featured in a book entitled *Memory, Migration and (de)colonisation in the Caribbean and beyond*, edited by Jack Webb and others; to be published in February 2020.

Extracts were published in *The Observer* a month or so ago, and I was disappointed not to see Joyce's name, so I was delighted to read her section of the book in its manuscript form.

She is off next Sunday to a school reunion, the oldest alumna. I left her listing the names of the students in her class, a feat well beyond me when I attended my own 60th reunion. **GT**

Peter Tayler

Premises Committee and Croydon Meeting say goodbye to Peter after almost 13 years when he has served as the Building Administer and Site Manager. He has been a loyal and hard-working member of the team that looks after the well-being of our two buildings. He knows all the contractors and who to call upon when something needs repairing and is on friendly terms with the hirers he has welcomed into the building over so many years.

He has always taken an interest in all our Quaker events and in the health and welfare of the older members of the Meeting. Mary Jakeman and Yvonne Kassim were on his support group for many years and he missed them very much when they passed on.

In later years his physical disability worsened although he fought to continue as long as he could. He also found the change to a new computer booking system difficult, as those of us struggling to master internet banking etc can understand.

We shall greatly miss his expertise and wide experience, and wish him improved health and a happy retirement.

To Float on the Waters of Existence

Some novelists can often be cynical and cruel about the ageing process (I'm thinking of you, Philip Roth), but I like Mark Twain's jaunty: 'Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter'. Part of life is, of course, a series of transition points all of which encompass ageing in an inescapable way. Preparing to move on starts well before the more advanced stages

of life when the need to adopt certain roles may decrease until eventually, in retirement, professional duties and/ or unwaged work are largely, but not wholly, put aside. At this point, it is possible to be so invested and attached to these roles and responsibilities, which seem to confer a perceived sense of worldly control and status, that they can be quite difficult to relinquish.

There may be an additional tendency to look back on past accomplishments and either give oneself a self-congratulatory pat on the back or take a little too much pride in having survived the many and varied challenges through which one has lived. Regret may also find a place in passing thoughts as memories of often unconscious, unskilful choices of both self and others drift to the forefront of the mind. Occasions marred by the dead hand of perfectionism, unrealistic expectations and harsh judgements remind me to remember that each of us may be flawed or wounded to some extent and therefore doing our best from our particular level of consciousness. I feel in agreement with Maya Angelou on this issue:

'Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better'.

In *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, a work on the inner lives of women, Clarissa Pinkola Estes suggests that the act of claiming our birthright, which she sees as that of thriving in life, can replace the grim hold of an outworn, perhaps defensive, 'survivor' mentality. She writes that rather than dwelling on past mis-steps or hard-won badges of honour, we put ourselves into the 'lush, the nutritive, the light' in order that we may continue to attain inner growth. Estes recommends many ways of achieving this, including : dance, artwork, being in Nature, words, paper, books and 'tree-leaning peace.' She cites ritual as one way in which humans can think about the past with compassion, accept and even memorialise it and gain renewed perspective on their lives. This may be 'Purim, Advent or drawing down the moon' or, one might add, the taking part in the peace of a Quaker Meeting.

In *The Way Out is the Way In*, the late Quaker writer and mystic Damaris Parker-Rhodes shared her view that the practice of inner silence 'teaches the skills needed to float on the waters of existence'. This beautiful phrase reminds me of the advice from St Francis:

'Wear the world as a loose garment, which touches us in a few places and there lightly'.

Parker-Rhodes goes on to explain that in the silence one is 'borne up and connected with an invisible environment'. This experience of contemplation may help one to see that each deprivation undergone can be likened to a mountain-climber who, on reaching higher altitudes, finds huts and depots for that which must be left behind.

And the irreversible past? This, from C.S. Lewis may provide balm:

'...forgive the inexcusable, for God has forgiven the inexcusable in you'.

Barbara Earl

Advices and Queries: reflection and experiential learning

On a recent Sunday, a small discussion group met to talk about the *Advices and Queries* (A&Q). As the *Queries and Advices* (yes, they are that way round in certain parts of the States) of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (1998) makes clear, 'the queries reflect the Quaker way of life, reminding Friends of the ideals we seek to attain'. From the off, so to speak, Quakers have been concerned not so much with dogma but rather with behaviour, how we express, act out, our values in what we actually do.

We all can make some sort of personal statement about the importance of A&Q. I carry of a copy of *Advices and Queries* in my backpack along with my house keys, spare hearing aid batteries, my phone and my bus pass. So the little red booklet is one of my essentials, one of things that I really need, one of the things that I check that I have got before leaving the house. I have always been impressed by its succinct style and always found the un-hectoring nature of its advice and questions helpful. It's rather like listening to the comments of an old friend. You know, the one who has been round the block a few times, and who actually wants to help me whatever the situation or crisis that – yet again - I have somehow got myself into. As asserted earlier, the emphasis in any discussion on what Quakers are about and how they go about things is on behaviour – what we actually do – and what we learn from that experience. In short, the focus is on experiential learning.

The American educational theorist David Kolb is especially interested in the internal cognitive experiences of individuals. He is famous for publishing in 1984 (www.simplypsychology.org/learning-Kolb.html) a four-stage learning cycle that perhaps Quakers can easily identify with. The four stages are:

- doing /having an experience (concrete experience)
- reviewing/reflecting on the experience (reflective observation)
- concluding/learning from the experience (abstract conceptualization)
- planning/trying out what has been learnt (active experimentation)
- and then starting all over again (hence the cycle)

Enough of the process, let's get back to the A&Q themselves. We've all got our favourite ones. Number 17 leads by a country mile for me. It's the punch line that does it: *Think it possible that you may be mistaken.*

And as I get older and more tired, there's always Number 27: *Live adventurously.*

The 42 paragraphs seem to cover the most important aspects of life. Three cheers for *Advices and Queries.*

Others in the discussion group shared their feelings about the importance of A&Q. Perhaps you'd like to take some time to reflect on them too and identify your favourite and most meaningful ones.

Helen Johnson

'Churches Together for the Climate'

On 20 November Churches Together in South London considered how churches could act together to respond to climate change. The room was packed. Young people had been specifically invited and there were a number of young adults, although the gathering did not fully reflect the ethnic diversity of South London.

Welcoming everyone, the Bishop of Woolwich, Karowei Dorgu, quoted *1 Peter 2.9*: '...ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that we should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light...'

The meeting opened with prayers, confessing our part in the current environmental destruction.

There were a number of speakers, mostly young, including the keynote speaker from Christian Climate Action, speaking about Christian involvement in Extinction Rebellion (XR). We heard alarming statistics about the current climate emergency: increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; ocean warming; rising sea levels and loss of biodiversity. It seems that every day we hear more news about the seriousness of the situation. The slowness of governments to respond has driven many younger people in particular to despair and to non-violent direct action. Faith communities have been actively involved, for example in the recent protests in London..

Giles Goddard, vicar of St John's Waterloo, acknowledged the part that Christian theology had played in justifying environmental destruction. He showed how Christian thinking had moved beyond the idea of a god who was outside the natural world and had given man dominion over it, to seeing the divine presence within a world in which we were called to be co-creators.

Representatives of Tearfund, Christian Aid and a number of other Christian organisations spoke. There is a bewildering variety. Those working in developing countries spoke about the effect that climate change was already having on the poorest people in the world, as increasingly frequent droughts and floods made their life even more precarious.

We also heard about the many ways in which Christian organisations are taking action to respond. Christian Aid are working with farmers to introduce new farming methods. Tearfund are campaigning to reduce the plastic waste we send for disposal in poorer countries; supplying solar panels in Tanzania and developing recycling hubs in Pakistan as part of their work to end poverty. 'Operation Noah' is campaigning for churches to divest from their investments in fossil fuels (Quakers have been among the first to take this action).

I also have information about other organisations, such as 'Eco-church' and 'Green Christian', which support churches in spiritual and practical action to transform to a more sustainable life. Quakers from Blackheath Meeting spoke about a day they had organised for local organisations to consider action on the environment. There will be another opportunity to hear about this at a London Quakers event on 11 January.

Three schoolgirls from Southwark spoke about how they and their friends had reduced their use of plastic. This reminded us that we can all take 'one small step' to transform our lives.

Rhiannon Rees

A winter walk in Clandon Wood

Many Friends reading this newsletter would have visited Clandon Wood in November 2018 when they attended Godfrey's funeral. In November 2019 I went, with my cousin Philip, to take part in a guided walk led by the resident ecologist, Matt, who also writes a monthly blog.

About fifteen of us set off, well wrapped up and shod in sturdy boots and wellies, to do a circuit of the grounds, now settling down for the winter. It had been raining relentlessly for days, but thankfully not that day, though the clouds were thick and low. The grasses and wild flowers, which had been knee-high in the two meadows when I visited in August on Godfrey's birthday, had been cut down, baled and stored, but the areas by the perimeter hedgerows and line of birch trees where the graves are, were uncut. About 15 percent is left in this way. The empty seed heads of poppies and wild carrots on the woody stalks reminded me of the numerous butterflies and dragonflies I had seen and the sharp herby scent in the air was now more leafy and earthy. The sheep which nibble the grasses during autumn and winter hadn't arrived yet from the nearby farm. Matt explained that the birds follow them to search for worms and that they leave the reedy uncut vegetation alone, so that overwintering butterflies and bumblebees, as well as small mammals, have a safe habitat all year round. We would find bee-orchids when we came again in the spring, he assured us.

At first we kept our eyes on the slippery path, on the lookout for fungi. This year has been a very good year for the many species to be found in the reserve. It didn't take long before someone spotted a very withered-looking puffball which had scatted its seeds over a wide area when a foot of man or beast trod on it.

Another specimen turned up, still growing and nibbled round the edges, probably by mice, and Matt told us how important fungi are in nourishing the soil, and how to recognise the one that will kill you if you eat it.

Although neither of the two ponds was particularly large, they nurtured a variety of insect life. One of the company offered a bucket of frog spawn from the pond in her garden, and it was gratefully accepted. Coots and moorhens bring up their families here and they are visited at night by deer, who apparently enjoy eating the fresh cut flowers thoughtfully laid out for them. Badger prints have been spotted, and Matt showed us a photo of one on his phone.

The trees at this side of the reserve are old and huge, unlike the birch and larch on the other side which were planted when the land became a nature reserve in 2006. Dutch elm disease has taken the tallest ones and the new plantings, which were treated to withstand the disease, hadn't yet gained their full height. Every binocular trained on a buzzard in an oak. They are an endangered species and we were very lucky to see one. It sat very high up watching us until it streaked off towards the Surrey Hills. A kestrel had raised her brood in the box on another tree, and a box awaited a small owl next spring if one from the nearby golf course wanted a change of habitat, and there were always red kites tumbling about in the skies. I didn't know that starlings are monogamous, Apparently even when a flock lands the pairs always feed together. Matt told us about the birds who had migrated from the east to join our own native birds. He was particularly enthusiastic about the redwings and the Dartford warbler.

The long patch of brown visible on one of the meadow floor seemed unremarkable until Matt explained what it was. When the meadow was in full growth it was out of bounds for humans and their dogs. Skylarks nested in that patch, out of sight of predators. Apparently the parents run very fast in among the stalks to feed their young, and the babies can do the same when only a few days old. I haven't heard or seen skylarks more than twice, and it was good to know that there is a flock feeding their young and singing in this quiet haven. *The Lark ascending* was the last piece of music we listened to together. Such joyous music, that exemplified both the beauty and brevity of life.

Gillian Turner

Funeral Poverty

On 18th November 2019 Quaker Social Action (QSA) held an event at Friends House to launch their report on funeral poverty. When they first started thinking about the impact of a death in the family for people on low incomes over a decade ago, the phrase 'funeral poverty' wasn't being used and the subject was barely discussed.

However QSA was listening to the families it worked with, whose existence was often very hard to mouth, telling them about the kinds of unexpected expenses that tipped them into financial precariousness, debt and stress, and funerals were frequently coming up as a concern. They spent time talking to bereaved people, the funeral industry, religious leaders, academics, health professionals and researchers time trying to understand this issue more. They found that no-one was specifically helping those who were worried about or unable to meet the cost, and so in 2010 they set up 'Down to Earth' to offer people on low incomes practical support to access an affordable and meaningful funeral. This was followed by the Fair Funerals campaign which ran from 2014 to 2018 and helped to bring about positive changes in both the funeral industry and government policy and practice.

Their report *Speaking truth to power: a decade of groundbreaking work on funeral poverty* assesses the progress made so far, and sets out a bold vision for continuing to tackle this issue. QSA is now fundraising for its Down to Earth service, which has helped over 4,000 people to date. It is the only UK-wide service providing free one-to-one advice and support to people struggling with funeral costs and they need to raise a further £500 per working day to help cover its running costs. Croydon meeting has kindly agreed to make a £1,000 donation from our legacies fund, which will hopefully be matched during the Big Give Christmas Challenge campaign (running 3-10 December) by pledges made by other supporters. If anyone wants to make a personal donation to QSA or to any of the many other charities taking part in the campaign this year you can do so here: <https://donate.thebiggive.org.uk/christmas-challenge-2019> .

Laura Roling

London Bridge / Fishmongers' Hall attack

Borrow his intelligence, share his drive, feel his passion, burn with his anger, and extinguish hatred with his kindness. Never give up his fight.

These are the words spoken by David Merritt, the grieving father of Jack Merritt who was killed in the tragic incident at a Learning Together event on Friday 29 November. Jack worked for the Learning Together programme, an educational initiative of the University of Cambridge, which brings together students from universities and prisons to study alongside each other in inclusive and transformative learning communities. David said that his son would not wish his death to be used as the pretext for more draconian sentences or for detaining people unnecessarily. Jack believed in the inherent goodness of humanity, and felt a deep social responsibility to protect that. In his memory, we need to take that message with us and do what we can to build a better world.

Laura Roling

NB There has not been much publicity given to the actions of two of the men who prevented the attacker from harming anyone else. They had both been through an intensive period of psychotherapy at Grendon prison. Alternatives to Violence was introduced by the prison governor at the time, a Quaker.

Busy end-of-year area meeting

About 22 Friends and attenders took part in a very busy area meeting held at Streatham on 17 November.

After a tasty lunch and a reading from Qfp, Isobel Lane led us in an 'exercise in mind-mapping', inspired by one devised by Woodbrooke-on-the-Road, in which we split into small groups and did what I would have called a word-association test, with a different word for each group. (My group's was 'Service'.)

Under Membership Matters, we agreed to terminate the memberships of three former Streatham & Brixton Friends whom overseers had been unable to contact, namely Kirsty Binnie, Berek Warren and Luke Waterfield.

Appointments made to the end of 2020 were: Treasurer Frances Touch, Assistant Treasurer Phil Laurence, Membership Clerk David Parlett, Clerk to trustees Helen Drewery, and Rachel Keenleyside (S&B) as overseer for the remainder of the triennium.

Richard Chinn introduced and explained a recent Trustees' proposal to appoint a paid AM bookkeeper who would operate a consolidated accounting process for the whole AM including its constituent LMs, thus relieving treasurers of much of their day-to-day and end-of-year work, excluding premises accounts. They would, however, retain responsibility for authorising payments, encouraging donations and helping their meetings to take financially sound decisions.

We asked Trustees to bring a final agreement back to Area Meeting for approval.

Gillian Turner presented her report on the Sanctuary Everywhere Conference held earlier this year and already published in our Newsletter.

Jo Doherty presented a detailed and beautifully prepared report on the work and progress of the Happy Baby Community. She thanked Area Meeting for this year's grant asked whether we could support the (now registered) charity again in 2020. We agreed a one-off payment of £5,000 from Area Meeting Legacies Fund to be paid in early 2020.

Streatham & Brixton's spiritual review followed, then an update on the pan-London Governance Project. The final report was from Bob Rogers on the work of Meeting for Sufferings.. In particular, he updated us on the SLAQM Concern on Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs, asking MfS to clarify how Britain Yearly Meeting engages with the wider political system. There has been wide interest in MfS in this issue, with agreement to revisit it. Future considerations will include ways to overcome the restrictive Lobbying Act.

Finally, we agreed dates and venues for Area Meeting and AMC (Area Meeting Committee) as follows: 19 January AMC and 16 February Area Meeting at Sutton, 15 March AMC and 17 May Area Meeting at Purley (to be confirmed), 21 June AMC and 20 September Area Meeting at Croydon, 18 October AMC and 15 November Area Meeting at Streatham. However, if Purley cannot host next year then Croydon and Streatham & Brixton will each move up a place in the sequence with the fourth meetings being clerked by Purley but held at Sutton. *David Parlett*

Events in December

**Wednesday -Friday, 5 -7 December at 7.30pm and
Saturday, 8 December at 3pm and 6.30pm.**

The Players of St Peter (of whom Roger is one) present an Annunciation and Nativity play from the Chester Cycle. Poster and flyers available.

Saturday 7th: You are warmly invited to come along to Trafalgar Square and the Big Sleep-out on 7th December as members of the LONDON QUAKERS Team. I'm going to get a banner so that we can find each other easily, and I hope that we will be able to get in to Westminster MH in the morning to get something warming inside us. I suppose that bacon rolls or Vegan equivalent are too much to hope for..... If you want to join the BSO with us, please sign up

at <https://register.bigsleepout.com/.../Worl.../team/LONDON-QUAKERS>

Sunday 15th: Roger Haworth will lead us in a group reading of a Mystery Play after meeting for worship and refreshments.

Wednesday 25th: Short meeting for worship from 10.30am 'as led'.

Events in January

Saturday 11th: 1030-1300 Friends House, Euston. Protecting Our Planet - Quakers Working Locally with others

Wednesday 15th: At 7pm we are warmly invited to the Christmas Concert in aid of Marie Curie charity at the Unitarian Church next door.

Friday 17th weekend: Diversity and Inclusion Gathering 2, Woodbrooke, Birmingham. The Diversity and Inclusion Gathering will build on the 2019 event and prepare Friends for Yearly Meeting Gathering 2020. Participants need to be familiar with the issues and come prepared to participate in worshipful reflection. 0121 472 5171, enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk www.woodbrooke.org.uk/diversity-and-inclusion-gathering

Sunday 19th: Area Committee Meeting at Sutton from 12.30.

Saturday 25th: Singing Workshop 10am-4pm, Friends House, London. Singing is a wonderful way of bringing your Quaker community together. Join Leonora Davies and Elena Browne for a day at Friends House as we explore how to use singing in

children's meeting, all-age worship and beyond. This is an event for all ages.

Sunday 26th: Croydon Friends New Year Social, starting with a 'bring and share' lunch, followed by games, conversation, etc.

Collected in November

03 Croydon Nightwatch **65.00**
10 Britain Yearly Meeting (*tbc*)
17 South London Area Meeting **35.00**
24 Homeless Floating Shelter **77.50**

Collecting in December: **01** Britain Yearly Meeting, **08** Refugee Youth (for 'Amazing People of the World'), **15** South London Area Meeting, **22** Friends Family Group, **29** Freedom from Torture,
Collecting in January: **5** Quaker work at home and abroad, **12** Area Meeting, **19** Woodbrooke, **26** Croydon Local meeting.

The deadline for the February edition is Sunday 26 January 2020
Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to
Gillian Turner *Te/07805087981 email/gillianturner033@gmail.com*

The January Birds

*The birds in Nunhead Cemetery begin
 Before I've flicked a switch, turned on the gas.
 There must be some advantage to the light
 I tell myself, viewing my slackened chin
 Mirrored in the rain-dark window glass,
 While from the graveyard's trees, the birds begin.
 An image from a dream survives the night,
 Some dreck my head refuses to encompass.
 There must be some advantage to the light.
 You are you I mouth to my shadow skin,
 Though you are me, assuming weight and mass —
 While from the graveyard's trees, the birds begin:
 Thrush, blackbird, finch — then rooks take fright
 At a skip-truck and protest, cawing en masse.
 There must be some advantage to the light,
 Or birds would need the gift of second sight
 To sing Another year will come to pass!
 The birds in Nunhead Cemetery begin,
 There must be some advantage to the light.*

Maurice Riordan