

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

February 2018

Dear Friends - With Christmas and New Year celebrations well past us, we look ahead to our Quaker year with many changes and challenges to come. Follow these in our newsletter!

Gillian Turner and David Parlett

The life of a religious society consists in something more than the body of principles it professes and the outer garment of organisation that it wears. These things have their own importance: they embody the society to the world, and protect it from the chance and change of circumstance; but the springs of life lie deeper, and often escape recognition. They are to be found in the vital union of the members of the society with God and with one another, a union which allows the free flowing through the society of the spiritual life which is its strength.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1905

News of Friends

Yvonne Kassim is largely housebound at present as she receives treatment for her legs and feet. We send her loving greetings.

Cecily Taylor remains at her care home in Windsor, close by her son, while she waits for accommodation to be available at the Bernard Barron Homes.

John Power is to have his first game, *Crystal Hall*, published by Gibson Games (who also publish David Parlett's games) in June this year. He is hoping to move nearer to Croydon so that he can attend meetings more regularly.

Waking Up

January, weather-wise, is a month that means business. Snow, rain and wind, they're all there. The result, for some of us, is yet another howling chest infection. On the plus side, there is that wonderful, hazy waking up after a long sleep. And the mind is relaxed enough to feel that it can tackle those 'the meaning of life' issues. Let's get some sort of understanding, get things sorted. Well, perhaps. I can remember conventional, church-going, bible-carrying Christianity failed for me a long time ago. Important matters were put on hold until there was time to deal with them. Now there is no excuse: they have to be confronted. Well, in the search for clarity, meaning, and, would you believe, authenticity, I've tried my best with secular philosophy. All that existential stuff always carries a warning that it's complicated, difficult to understand. Too right. All thought up by oddball Scandinavian and German geezers so clever that they never seem able to maintain any meaningful relationships and end up living alone and/or completely bonkers. The emphasis seems to be mostly on the brilliant individual being surrounded by a lot of rather dim people who need either to be ignored or who are just waiting to be told what to do. Sorry, is that too flippant? What about coping with the world as it really is....on a walking down the street to the shops or watching the six o'clock news basis.... So, moving on, what about Quakerism? There is certainly a lot to read! Quakers are a ferociously – ironically enough - literate bunch and there hardly seems to be anything that hasn't been written about - and accessibly too. As a very new Quaker, I like that it's all there, if you want it, on a pick and mix sort of basis. You take this from here and this from there and it comes together that makes emotional and moral sense for you. For those of us who are reluctant to abandon a cultural heritage, there's the influence of Christianity. But this is one that is not concerned with hierarchy and ritual – and not on believing something that defies reason, on not believing, when required, something that's plain daft. It is something that rings true in your own experience and impacts on what you actually do, on how you behave day out, day in. I remember, as a teenager, telling my father who was a son of the manse and Kirk elder – the full nine yards – exactly what was wrong with his Christianity. He quietly replied that 'there's not a lot wrong with the Sermon on the Mount'. And of course, he was right. Others find what is meaningful for them and put it all together in way that works for them. But – and this how it seems to me – that the people at meeting are engaged in this individual and on-going task together. The commonalities that silent worship has with the currently very fashionable mindfulness are obvious. But differs, it would seem,

in one very important way. This is an individual/communal enterprise that does not withdraw from the realities of the everyday world - and goes on to express itself in positive social action. It is a private and a shared experience moves beyond rationality into another sphere when another person speaks to my/our condition. Rational thinking, spirituality and concern for the world all come together. What more could anybody want? Or realistically expect?

Helen Johnson

You Do It to Me

Recently, the BBC's oft maligned "The One Show" presented a fascinating piece on Paul Robeson, the famous actor, singer and civil rights activist who had very strong links with the people of Wales.

Appearing in the musical *Showboat* in London in 1928, he met Welsh miners who had walked to the capital to highlight the suffering of thousands of families owing to prolonged unemployment. Robeson, the son of a slave and a fierce exponent of racial equality and workers' rights, was moved by their spirit and plight and subsequently visited Wales on many occasions to sing, support and address the NUM. In 1958, Robeson's passport was cancelled by the US government as he was suspected of communism. A transatlantic telephone link allowed him to sing from his apartment in New York to the miners and their families in Porthcawl and a male voice choir sang back in grateful response to this huge star who had offered so much to them. The people of Wales have another strong link with the USA in the form of a stunningly beautiful stained-glass window donated to the 16th Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1963, a bomb was placed in the building causing utter devastation and killing four schoolgirls in the blast. Outrage at this attack was, understandably, international and in Wales, John Petts, a Carmarthenshire artist, formulated the idea of raising funds from the Welsh people to provide a replacement church window in support of the grieving congregation. Petts travelled to Alabama to get a feel for the kind of design the people of Alabama might want. None had heard of Wales and did not know where it was but understood that the hand of solidarity and friendship had been extended in the worst of times. Petts returned home still unsure of his brief. How to represent in modern times and in very particular circumstances the idea of Christian love and compassion in stained-glass? Inspiration came from Jesus' words of grace: "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me". *Matthew 25: 40* Jesus' identification with every member of humanity was an ideal starting point for Petts' creative process. As a result, The Wales Window in Alabama stands as a bold piece depicting a black Christ as on a cross, His right hand pushing away oppression and hatred and His left offering forgiveness. A bold piece indeed for the times. At the foot of the window, the paraphrase is written, "You Do It To Me" along with "Given by the People of Wales".

Barbara Earl

Your Flowers

I thought I had tidied you away
in that drawer marked
people I have loved.
Then sunlight fell on a glass tumbler
crammed with forsythia
and I was undone again,
remembering your flowers.
The artless gathering from your garden
for the Meeting House.
A hydrangea head in a soup-plate.
The way you were humble
in the face of beauty,
not seeking to arrange it, simply saying
Here it is. Share my pleasure. Your gift was to see us all as flowers,
not ignoring the spikes and the spoiled leaves
but prepared to hold us anyway. How I miss you, who quietly
persisted
in seeing the flower
while I felt myself only thorns.

Jane Pearn (published in 'Matters Arising')

Holocaust Memorial Day- Theme for 2018: The Power of Words

Barbara Earl and Mary Jakeman attended the Memorial event at the Croydon Town Hall, on Friday, 26 January, 2018 on behalf of our Quaker Meeting. The day is an international event which marks the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz- Birkenau in January, 1945. At 12 noon, the Mayor, Councillor Toni Letts, addressed the people gathered in the entrance hall about the necessity and importance of the day. The leader of the Council also spoke about the wonderfully diverse population found in Croydon and the chance we have to live together in harmony. Marilyn Arbisman, representative from Croydon Synagogue, gave the Holocaust Memorial Day speech and read the poem *The Butterfly*, by Pavel Friedmann who died in 1942 in Terezin. The Mayor lit a candle in remembrance of the millions lost in the Holocaust of the Second World War and subsequent atrocities and genocides such as Cambodia, Rwanda and Darfur. Following this we went into the Hall for the civic part of the event where we heard inspiring and poignant testimony from key-note speaker, Wlodka Robertson, a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto. Her final message to us was to learn from the past and work hard to keep everyone in society safe. A first-rate programme of various items comprising moving poetry, readings and musical pieces from local school children included a marvellous piece of Mendelssohn played by a string quartet. The wide range of offerings showed both the pupils' personal concerns and knowledge of history. Their understanding that words have immense power was made very clear to the audience. Before we left we made an entry in the Book of Remembrance on behalf of the Meeting.

Barbara Earl and Mary Jakeman

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
against a white stone...

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Pinned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto.

Pavel Friedmann 4.6.1942

The poem is preserved in typewritten copy on thin paper in the collection of poetry by Pavel Friedmann, which was donated to the National Jewish Museum during its documentation campaign. It is dated June 4, 1942 in the left corner. Pavel Friedmann was born January 7, 1921, in Prague and deported to Terezín [concentration camp] on April 26, 1942. He died in Oswiecim (Auschwitz) on September 29, 1944.*

Croydon Festival of Peace

Croydon Festival of Peace 2018 marks the centenary of the end of the First World War. Croydon will commemorate this with a Festival of Peace. Gillian Turner and I went to a meeting of Croydon Communities Consortium on 23 January, where Katie Rose, the Festival co-ordinator, told us about what is planned. The main events will start with the festival at Wandle Park on 16 June and end at Park Hill Park on 23 June. Groups all over Croydon are invited to hold participative events, using community spaces, creating experiences of peace and making them as inclusive as possible. Katie invited us to join in breathing exercises, chanting and sharing with someone we didn't know

what peace meant to us. The centrepiece of the Festival will be a new Anthem for Peace, commissioned with crowd funding by the London Mozart Players, currently in residence at St John's in Upper Norwood while the Fairfield Halls are refurbished. This will be performed at all the main events and there will be education packs to go with it. Groups are invited to create events to explore what peace means to Croydon, using our strengths, creating space for dialogue and leaving a legacy for the future. Events will include films and other cultural activities, most of which will be non-ticketed. There will also be a yoga event, with as many yoga teachers as possible. A variety of local organisations are likely to be organising events, including Faiths Together in Croydon, who organise regular events about peace, Thornton Heath Community Action, Broad Green Residents Association, and Croydon and Crystal Palace Transition Towns. There is likely to be a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) event. International links, such as the Arnhem link and a link between the Rise Gallery and Lebanon, will also be involved. We were invited to volunteer to help with the Peace Garden at Park Hill Park. Other community gardens across Croydon are likely to be involved and another speaker told us about a plan for a *Croydon Green Mile* to link people and improve the public realm along the London Road between West Croydon and Thornton Heath. A joint crowdfunder last year raised £10,000, of which about half went to the London Mozart Players to commission the Anthem. Croydon Council have also made a small contribution. Katie invited us to ask ourselves three questions: What could I do for myself that would give me more peace?

What could I do that involves others?

What could we do for the Festival? At the invitation of the organisers, Gillian spoke briefly about Croydon Meeting, the Quaker Peace Testimony and the groups of young refugees and asylum-seekers that use our buildings. We also heard various items of other local news. The local plan has been approved and published. There is a consultation about Matthews Yard conference centre. Despite a *Save Matthews Yard* campaign, the site is likely to be completely re-developed for residential accommodation, some 'affordable', possibly with some community space.

Rhiannon Rees

Meeting House News

Hirer honoured

Once a month we have a hirer who holds a meeting for foster carers. The convener Martin Williams has been honoured in the New Years Honours. He was made a MBE. We congratulate Martin and wish him well in the future.

Police surgery

PC Oliver White, Metropolitan Police Fairfield Ward, will set up a table in the foyer on Wednesday 7 February 1730-1845 hours, with a variety of leaflets and pamphlets. He tells us that the reason for this is that every local neighbourhood team are being asked to set up and attend public engagement events, whereby PCSOs are in one place for an hour or so, and the hope is, when advertised, this event will be well attended. It will be advertised on Fairfield SNT's Twitter page @MPSFairfield, on the Facebook page MPSFairfield, as well as being emailed out as part of the weekly crime email, which is sent to all residents whose email address we have.

Quinquennial Works at Croydon Meeting House

Every five years, hence the name, the London Quakers Property Trust who owns all the London Meeting Houses, including our own, undertakes a survey of the buildings, issues a report on their state, and decides what work needs to be undertaken to bring the buildings up to a good standard.

We had our survey in August last year, our Premises Committee studied it in detail, and were relieved to see that the conclusion was that both buildings were, for their age, in reasonably good condition. However, there were a number of works which needed to be done, and we had the task of liaising with John Dash, the manager of LQPT, to decide which was the most urgent. The main items were the Adult School Hall drains and gutters, the meeting house tiles where water had come through into two areas, the West Room and one of the flat bedrooms, the wall by the pedestrian gate, and some minor items such as the meeting house floor. Because we had ourselves paid for the upgrade of the toilets and the installation of the accessible toilet, John was able to suggest that we had our kitchen redesigned, a suggestion which was met with great delight.

A surveyor, Wayne Davidson who oversaw the work on our accessible toilet, has been employed to oversee all that needs to be done, and we are now faced with the task of deciding when it all takes place.

At February's Area Meeting to be held at Sutton FMH on 18 February, the clerk of LQPT Bernadette O'Shea will be telling us about the work of the Trust. We tend to take the ownership of our meeting house and Adult School Hall for granted, knowing that they are being well looked after day by day by our site manager Peter Taylor, cleaned regularly by Megan Carmichael, and that our Premises Committee check income and expenditure and take overall responsibility for keeping the buildings in good heart. Yet we are only one of 35 London Meeting Houses, some going back to George Fox's time.

I do hope that you will make the effort to go to Sutton to hear Bernadette's talk, remembering that our business meetings are meetings for worship and part of our religious experience.

Qfp 10.03 reads: *Our shared experience of waiting for God's guidance in our meetings for worship and for church affairs, together with careful listening and gentleness of heart, forms the basis from which we can live out our life of love with and for each other, and for those outside our community.*

Gillian Turner clerk of Premises Committee

Whodunnit?

A mini-drama reported in 'The Friend' of 10 Feb 2018.

Cast of characters: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, Nobody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody knew Anybody could have done it, but was sure that Somebody would do it, so didn't do it himself.

In fact, Nobody did it.

Everybody got angry about that, because as far as Everybody was concerned, although Anybody could have done it, Somebody really should have done it.

Anybody could indeed have done it (and Everybody thought Somebody might have asked him to), but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it, so Nobody did it.

So, in the end, Everybody blamed Somebody because Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

Which is a bit rich when you think that Everybody was asked to do it in the first place.

Jamie Wrench, Southern Marches Area Meeting

Talking of Whodunnits, I've just finished reading a 1930s classic by the prolific author Sydney Fowler entitled The Jordans Murder. It takes place in the village of Jordans, whose meeting house, you may recall, contains the burial place of William Penn, and the key witness is a lady member of that meeting. Fowler speaks well of Quakers. Let me know if you'd like to borrow it. – DP

Coming up...

Thursday, 15 February: Peace History: Two courses at City Lit 2018 - 18:00 to 19:30.

1. Peace in the Shadows of World War. 15th Feb – 15th March 2018. Five Thursdays, 6.00 pm – 7.30 pm. After the 'war to end wars', how did the aims of the peace-builders in 1919 give way to the horrors of a second global conflict in 1939? This course explores peace movements in the inter-war years, focusing on Britain but foreign policy and The League of Nations, the rise of fascism, disarmament conferences and Appeasement. Web link:

<https://www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/history-culture-and-writing>

Saturday 17 February: Being and Becoming a Quaker Chaplain 10:00 to 16:30, Friends House, Sarah Fell Room. Quaker Chaplains and those considering a leading for chaplaincy will gather at Friends House, to hear about the nature of the work in the various shapes it takes for us: in prisons, hospitals, hospices, universities, workplaces and other settings. Each has its particular aspects, and all have common underlying themes. Web link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/quaker-chaplaincy-day-conference-london-quakers-tickets-41138438176>

Thursday 22 February: 'This Evil Thing' The compelling, shocking and inspiring story of Britain's First World War conscientious objectors – and the men and women who supported them. 19:00 to 21:00, St Augustine's Church, Mattison Road, London N4 1BG (tube to Manor House

or Turnpike Lane, buses 29, 141, & 341 stop at Mattison Rd) NO NEED TO BOOK – JUST COME ALONG

Sunday 18 February: Area Meeting 12.30pm, at Sutton mh.

Sunday 25 February: Quakers before Quakers Fourth Sunday illustrated Powerpoint presentation by David Parlett, showing that Quakerism was not 'invented from scratch' in 1652 but had been prefigured by similar spiritual and 'heretical' movements for several hundred years before. Fox knew and was influenced by many of them.

Collected in January

Cash collections only

7 Quaker Work £75.00

14 Area Meeting £33.00

21 Woodbrooke £60.00

28 Local Meeting £37.00

The 'copper collection' was £10.00 as at 31 December 2017.

Business Meeting decided that this should be donated to the Friends Family Group.

Collecting in February: 4 Friends Family Group, 11 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad, 18 South London Area Meeting, 25 Timanne School, Nairobi

The deadline for the March edition is Sunday 25 February 2018

**Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner
Tel 020 8688 9659 email gillianturner033@gmail.com**

Betelgeuse

On Betelgeuse
the gold leaves hang in golden aisles
for twice a hundred million miles,
and twice a hundred million years
they golden hang and nothing stirs,
on Betelgeuse.

Space is a wind that does
not blow on Betelgeuse,
and time — oh time — is a bird,
whose wings have never stirred
the golden avenues
of leaves on Betelgeuse.

On Betelgeuse
there is nothing that joys or grieves
the unstirred multitude of leaves,
nor ghost of evil or good
haunts the gold multitude
on Betelgeuse.

And birth they do not use
nor death on Betelgeuse,
and the God, of whom we are
infinite dust, is there
a single leaf of those
gold leaves on Betelgeuse.

Humbert Wolfe, "Betelgeuse", from *The Unknown Goddess* (1925)

Contributed by David Parlett ("One of my favourite poems, and hauntingly set by Gustav Holst")