

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

January 2017

Dear Friends,

David Parlett and I wish you all a happy and healthy 2017. Our newsletter will keep you up to date with what is going on in our Quaker community, and in this, our first edition, we celebrate the installation of our long-awaited accessible toilet, signal this year's triennial Yearly Meeting Gathering, and our annual social event. A number of our readers have been ill during the Christmas season, and we wish them all a speedy recovery.

Thank you again to everyone who sends in articles and suggestions – more please!

Gillian Turner

Quakers Believe

That Christianity
is a practical religion
to be lived out
in daily life.
Christ's light
shows us the way.
Christ's love
gives us strength.
Christ's example
gives us courage

From Westbury Meeting Long Island, New York, contributed by Joyce Trotman

Peter Tayler, our Buildings Administrator, would like to thank you all for the most generous gift that you collected for him for Christmas. It is greatly appreciated and he sends you all his best wishes for 2016.

Accessible toilet – thanks to Erica

On New Year's Day, appropriately, we celebrated with much excitement the installation at last of our new accessible toilet, paid for from Erica Taylor's bequest to our meeting. How pleased she would have been to know that she gifted us this long-awaited facility! I remember her well. She was almost 100 when she died, confined to her downstairs rooms with convenient conveniences within reach, always cheerful and smiling despite her handicaps. She had been a teacher, loved words and wrote poetry. Beside her chair she had a photograph of a poem we both loved – here quoted in her memory:

Stopping by woods on a snowy evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost

New Year Ramblings

Welcome, Friends to 2017. The wild bells have ceased their ringing but, no doubt, we have not seen the last of the wild sky, judging on recent experiences. I have been trying to find out who wrote about the New Year, apart from Tennyson, and it has been an interesting project to pursue... I discovered this poem, by that lesser known poet 'Anon':

The Young New Year has come so soon

I wonder where the Old Years go?
To some dim land behind the moon
Where starlight glimmers, pale and low.
And everything is grey and cold
And there they sit, those ancient years,
Their eyes so kind, and dim and old
Their faces lined with vanished cares.
Their voices rattle, dry like bones,
The while they talk of what has been,
And murmur in their hollowed tones
Of all the triumphs they have seen.
While the Young Year, with earnest eyes,
Comes buoyant on, to run his race,
Nor dreams how fast his life-span flies
Nor how his end draws on apace.

...and what about the bells?... They have been around a long time, but, it seems to me, they are not written about all that often (not forgetting John Betjeman who was 'summoned' by them.).

And what about 'Auld Lang Syne', or, in English, 'Old Long Ago'? Is it about time the English had their own New Year song? Some time ago now, Norman Newell (1919-2004) wrote English words to 'Auld Lang Syne' but they didn't catch on.

Within his work as EMI Record Producer, there were plenty of opportunities to write lyrics to tunes for many artists, and often translations from Italian and Spanish, usually under his own name, but sometimes using a pseudonym. I wonder if he ever wrote about bells....

WEFH

Meister Eckhart Part Two - Moved by the Truth

In *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion*, Rufus Jones, the famous Quaker author, philosopher and teacher, wrote that Meister Eckhart, the great fourteenth-century Dominican preacher and mystical genius, was one of the few persons in history to have felt the life of God with a vivid sense of reality. Added to which, he was able to tell of his profound, spiritual experiences and communicate what they signified to the common folk who flocked in huge numbers to hear his sermons. Interestingly, Jones placed Eckhart in the same company as St Augustine, Dante, St Teresa, Jacob Boehme and George Fox.

Despite his own prodigious administrative capacities and towering intellect, Eckhart spoke "in the tongue of the common man". He was humble, kind and understood with tender insight the daily lives of each of the trainee priests, nuns and parishioners under his care. He was no ivory-tower academic as it seems that Eckhart demonstrated traits of both Mary and Martha as he was as strong "in practical activity as he was in quiet contemplation".

Eckhart, however, belonged wholeheartedly to his church, he loved its sacraments and was an important member of its hierarchy but he insisted fiercely "upon the inalienable right of the individual soul to find its own direct pathway to God". He believed that the school of the Holy Spirit was the highest form of schooling and that "a person can learn more in the twinkling of an eye than all the doctors can teach him". Eckhart felt that "all the preaching friars and barefoot monks on earth" would not be able to stand against one person moved by the truth.

The truth for him is not to be found in the surface mind, it is to be found deep down "in the ground and innermost centre of the soul". This truth is the divine "spark" within and it is not to be

found outside. This innermost essence for Eckhart, writes Jones, is a “junction of the soul with God” and union takes place there for us all in our true home - at One with the Invisible.

Two years after his death, a Papal Bull condemned twenty- eight propositions drawn from his writings. The Bull declared, without irony of course, that Eckhart “wished to know” more than the doctrines of the church proclaimed. Jones writes that many years later in the seventeenth century, George Fox was a part of the same stream of mysticism which started with Dionysius and included among others, Meister Eckhart and the Friends of God. It would be difficult to find out if Fox was aware of such thinkers as he mentions none in his Journals, although Jim Pym in his *Listening to the Light* writes “There may or may not have been physical contact with these ideas, but the essence of their teachings and practices was in the air”. Perhaps Fox would have felt it best to leave out any academic or theological references in order to avoid alienating less traditionally educated followers and seekers? The emphasis, of course, being at all times on one’s inner experience, regardless of one’s so- called station in life.

Fox, like Eckhart was absolutely certain as a result of deep experience, that “Christ is come to teach His people himself”, not as an outward figure, but as the inward light, “the True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). Pym recounts that following one particularly significant time, Fox heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Jesus Christ, that can speak to thy condition”. After this revelation which he knew “experimentally”, he travelled across the country and met other searchers who became so inspired by his preaching that they formed the core of the Quaker movement, which became known as the Valiant Sixty.

Pym makes the point that ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit, discovered anew by individuals in each generation, which is the real founder of spiritual life. Fox perceived his answers in the inner voice which he identified as the Inward Light. “Christ is come to teach His people himself” seems to indicate an idea of union with the divine rather than worship of an external entity. Perhaps the revelations of such spiritual lights and visionaries as Meister Eckhart and George Fox may inspire us to find and communicate our own?

Barbara Earl

Learning from understatement

A couple of months ago, I went with some friends to the St Cuthman’s retreat near Coolham, Sussex. We knew that we’d enjoy the silence, the privacy - and then the conversations and companionship at mealtimes. The weather was good for a change and one afternoon I set off for a stroll into the nearby village - and it turned out to be the proverbial walk down memory lane.

Once upon a time I earned my living by visiting and writing about schools, faith ones in particular. My country walk took me down the side of the busy road, a sharp right turn and there the school was, pretty much as I remembered it. The William Penn Primary, founded by the Society of Friends in 1891, was taken into the maintained sector in 1952. I think that it remains the only primary school in the state sector with Quaker connections. When I visited the school about sixteen years ago, with no real prior knowledge about Quakers, the children wore sweatshirts with a picture of William Penn shaking hands with a Native American chief. There were other links with him. This was a time when schools still published prospectuses and the one for this school told the story of William Penn, who in agreement with the indigenous people founded Pennsylvania as ‘a land governed by love instead of force’. The prospectus went on to make a clear statement about his values and their relevance today: ‘as a school we also subscribe to the same ideals as William Penn strived for – kindness, tolerance and understanding’.

But these historic links apart, how *Quaker* was this school? As somebody used to visiting Catholic and Anglican schools, there seemed to be very little that was overtly religious about the school. I was used to ‘reading’ the walls, searching for religious symbols and pictures. (There seemed to be nothing specifically and recognisably Christian, such as crucifixes, in the school, as would be almost certainly found in, say, a Catholic school). Yes, there were the declared values in the prospectus: order, warmth and friendliness, academic excellence and an expectation of certain kinds of behaviour that embodied these values. Of course, silence was a meaningful part of the worship engaged in by school assemblies. But what was clear from the interviews with the head teacher, staff, school governor and parents that while there was a desire to promote certain values within the school there was no anxiety to claim them as somehow as exclusively Quaker values, there was no need to be dogmatic.

I can remember getting into my car for the drive home up the motorway, perhaps rather disappointed at the seeming lack of an overt culture that would have been so easy to write about. Then, of course, it dawned on me that this was the point. If anything is ever certain with Quakers, it is that their culture is a sophisticated one. It is predicated, in the main, on experience and reflection, and the acting out of values in which the intentionality of behaviour is regarded as important rather than a complicated or detailed system of beliefs. So, that's what I wrote about. I'd got my article after all and learnt the lesson that understatement can speak volumes.

Helen Johnson

Quaker Values in Education Group

You may be interested in learning about this listed group within Yearly Meeting which arose out of a widely held concern about the state of our schools and the impact of recent policy moves on the educational principles and practices to which many teachers feel committed.,

It has produced a booklet, *Quaker Insight in Education*. Quakers often pose questions and offer statements for consideration, rather than telling people what to believe or how to act, as in our *Advices and Queries*.

As someone involved all my professional life with supporting students and teachers, I find this booklet helpful and inspirational, with advice and guidance for the classroom and for individual schools, as well as advice from teachers to teachers who strive to uphold testimonies of peace, truth, simplicity and equality in their working lives.

Copies of the booklet can be ordered free of charge from their web-site <http://www.qvine.org.uk> The group would like to organise a day or half-day 'Roadshow' in our Area Meeting to reflect on the issues raised in the booklet and would aim to provide one or two members of their team to assist such an event.

The Convener of the group, Jeff Beatty, asks whether we would like to promote this and would be glad to receive names of those willing to help at our end.

I will circulate this article to the other local meetings in our Area Meeting.

If you would like to be involved, please email Jeff Beatty at jeff.beatty@smquakers.org.uk and let me know how you get on.

Gillian Turner (AM Meeting for Sufferings representative)

The Quaker Experience

With editorial apologies for omitting the second paragraph from our November issue

Having spent considerable time and energy placing the bold banner "THE QUAKER EXPERIENCE" on the outside of our boundary wall for our recent Open Afternoon, I am hoping it will elicit some curiosity when seen by passers by. How will I answer the question "What is the Quaker experience?" if asked about it?

In our Quaker Meetings for Worship we sit for an hour, mostly in silence, waiting to experience divine presence. Sometimes one of us will be inspired to stand up and speak to the meeting, or to read aloud from the Bible or some other inspirational text. This is called "vocal ministry". It might be a message for the whole meeting, or something that's deeply meaningful to an individual who is present.

There is also the ministry of silence, inwardly supporting each other. Silence within our mind is needed, not just a quiet room, in order to experience the presence and true inspiration. This stilling of the mind is a process of letting go of outside sounds, bodily sensations and thoughts. It doesn't matter whether these are "good" or "bad": they are all distractions from our inner peace of mind and spirit. This experience is much more difficult to achieve when I do it alone in meditation. Unlike most forms of meditation, the Quaker experience is a group experience. This Quaker practice is based on Jesus' promise: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20)

The guidance we receive is sometimes leading us to initiate or support projects that are of benefit to humankind and the natural world. Peace-making and eliminating causes of war are an important part of Quaker work. I heard about one such project thirty-five years ago from a very old Quaker in South Wales: He and three other Friends had been in the Soviet Union shortly after the

revolution running a top secret famine relief scheme to feed five million people. It had to be done secretly because the Soviet Government denied the existence of the famine and would otherwise have let their people starve. The scheme was supported by Quakers in Britain and administered by the four Friends in Russia. Quaker peace-making is currently taking place, also with some degree of secrecy. At home we are also concerned about housing and interfaith relations.

As a local Meeting for Worship, we are a supportive community and we welcome you to come and be with us. We will not try to “convert” you or expect you to subscribe to a creed or dogma. Our core belief is that there is something of the divine in every person.

The Quaker experience is open to all, not just those in membership. So if you really want to know more, come and try it!

Gordon Spence

Some Fruits of Solitude

Recently browsing in an antiquarian bookshop in Lewes I came across a squarish book, with a plain cover and rough-cut pages, which turned out to be a work by William Penn that I’d never heard of – namely, *Some Fruits of Solitude*. The fact that it was in a protected glass cabinet suggested that it might be expensive. Indeed it was: on enquiry, the owner checked in an online catalogue and quoted £300. Not in my range at all! Fortunately, when I got home and went online I found a copy in a hardback cover for £12.20. What’s more, it seemed to be the same edition, published in 1908 and with the same rough-cut page edges. (In fact, to be accurate, they’re deckle edged, and only on the outside edge.) So I think I did well on that bargain.

The book consists of a series of thoughts and aphorisms, containing some 556 numbered paragraphs, with an additional 299 in a sequel entitled, inevitably, *More Fruits of Solitude*. Penn himself calls them not aphorisms but “Reflections and Maxims”, and their average brevity can be gauged from the fact that the whole occupies only 170 pages of quite large text (about 12pt) on quite small pages (about 13 x 18cm).

The author’s introduction begins “*Reader – This Enchiridion*, I present thee with, is the Fruit of Solitude: a School few care to live in, tho’ None instructs us better. Some Parts of it are the Result of serious Reflection: others the Flashings of lucid Intervals: writ for private Satisfaction, and now publish’d for an Help to Human Conduct.* / *The Author blesseth God for his Retirement, and kisses that Gentle Hand which led him into it: For though it should prove Barren to the World, it can never do so to him. / He has now some Time he could call his own; a Property he was never much Master of before...*”

Interestingly, the Harvard Classics website notes “The aphorisms of the founder of Pennsylvania, published anonymously so as not to be reimprisoned for disloyalty, epitomize the simple Quaker truths upon which the Republic would be based”. Though not forming a deliberately connected sequence, they are nevertheless arranged into subject headings, beginning, for example, “Ignorance - Education - Pride - Luxury” and so on. The very first of them reads “It is admirable to consider how many Millions of People come into, and go out of, the World, Ignorant of themselves, and of the World they live in”.

The author of an introduction to the work notes with surprise how hard it now is (in 1908) to find a copy, although it was once the most popular of books, and throughout the 18th century was never out of print. Bearing in mind the first aphorism quoted above, I can’t help wondering if Alexander Pope had the work in the back of his mind when he wrote, in his *Essay on Man*,

*Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is Man.*

Of the others suffice to say here that you will already know several of them from their appearance in Qfp, including the much loved 19:28 (“The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers”).

This is a most inspiring and heartening book by one of the Society’s best-loved forefathers. I’m glad to have found it, and feel inclined to use more of Penn’s “fruits” as space-fillers in future editions of the Newsletter.

David Parlett

* *A handbook or manual; a concise treatise serving as a guide or for reference (OED).*

Yearly Meeting Gathering

29 July – 5 August at Warwick University

Every three years we hold a Yearly Meeting Gathering, an event which brings together Friends, friends and families for an exciting week of community, fun, worshipping and working together. There will be business meetings, outings, lectures, workshops, singing, talking, swimming, knitting, dancing, new friends, old friends and fun. There are the Young Adults at YMG, Junior Yearly meeting, Children and Young People's Programme, all taking place at the same time.

Booking opens on 4 January and closes on 30 April. You should book online via the Quaker website at www.quaker.org.uk/ym or phone 020 7663 1040 to be sent a form. If you wish to be accommodated as a group the whole group must be booked and paid for at the same time.

If you require a bursary please alert Overseers who will advise you (Veronica Double is clerk of Overseers). If you are considering attending please tell Elders (Liz Collins is clerk of Elders).

The theme concludes our three-year consideration of Living out our Faith in the World, working with Others to change the World.

The Spiritual Preparation document will be sent out in early April and Documents in Advance in May. If you would like a printed copy of all the details of booking, cost and dates, and any other information, please speak to Godfrey Turner, a member of the clerking team.

Our New Year Bring and Share Social

to be held on 22 January (Fourth Sunday) after meeting for worship

Lunch:

Please sign Cathy's sheet to tell her what you intend to bring and share. This should begin about 1pm.

Games

David Parlett, Liz Collins and the children will be bringing a selection of their favourite games. Please bring one of your favourites too.

We hope to end about 4pm.

Diary dates

Breakfast every Sunday morning from 9 to 10 am.

Please join us for porridge, toast and coffee. Coffee available until 10.15

Sunday 8 January: Meeting for worship for business Croydon local business meeting, 12:25.

Monday 9 January: Informal study group 2.30 in the Friends' Room.

Friday 13 January: Red Flag over Bermondsey The Ada Salter Story, Written and Performed by Lynn Morris, directed by Dave Morris. 7.30 - 9pm at Kingston mh, Fairfield East, KT1 2PT.

Donations requested £10/concessions £5. All profits and donations from Red Flag over Bermondsey will be used to support our work with the Women's Co-operative of Seir, West Bank, Palestine. Eventbrite booking link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/red-flag-over-bermondsey-journeymen-theatre-tickets-28848372258?aff=es2>

Saturday 14 January: Nurturing our Spiritual Roots A quiet day at Wandsworth Meeting House, 10:00 to 16:30, 59 Wandsworth High Street London SW18 2PT. Bookings/Enquiries to Linda Murgatroyd. A day of reflection rooted in silent worship. Please bring something to share for lunch which will be eaten together in silence. We will close the day with some worship-sharing, followed by tea and cake at 4pm.

Saturday 14 January: New Approaches to Foreign Policy London Region/SOAS CND

Conference-January 14th, at SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London, WC1H 0XG, 12:18 to 17:18 [sic]. At the UN recently 123 countries voted for negotiations on a global nuclear weapons ban. Britain and the US voted against. Come and discuss this and issues such as new weapons, Trident, arms sales etc. Speakers: Larry Sanders (Green Party); Steven Rose (Open University); Chris Cole (Drone Wars); Ellie Kinney (Youth and student CND); Kate Hudson (CND) and others.

Saturday 14 January: Feeding the Darkness 7.30 - 10.30pm, Kingston Quaker Centre, Fairfield East, Kingston upon Thames KT1 2PT. By Journeyman Theatre (Lynn and Dave Morris). 'Art

Thou in Darkness? Mind it not for if thou dost, it will fill thee more...' (James Nayler). This 65 minute performance is a result of extensive research into the dark world of state-sanctioned torture and its stark impact on victims, perpetrators, families and those who collude in the 'process'.

Sunday 15 January: Area Committee meeting 12:30 at Sutton mh. Not restricted to members of Area Meeting Committee - all Friends are welcome and encouraged to attend.

Saturday 21 January: Betty Ellis memorial meeting 2.30pm at Croydon mh. Refreshments provided.

Sunday 22 January: Croydon Friends New Year Social Fun, food and games the Quaker way.

Thursday 26 January: People and Planet Talk and discussion in the "People and Planet" series at Sutton mh, 7.30 -9.30pm. Topic yet to be notified

Saturday 28 January: Preparing for death Practical, ethical and Christian debate. Friends House, Euston, 10:00 to 17:00 Join us at this ecumenical gathering for a day of conversation, reflection and debate.

Saturday 11 February: Second Housing Day Friends House, 10:30 to 16:00. A follow-on day from the very successful day on 20 February 2016. This one will concentrate on what can be done, and look at items such as community land trusts. (This needs to be booked via Eventbrite, but the link provided on the London Quakers website is the wrong one. We have asked for a correction.)

Sunday 19 February: Area business meeting From 12.30 at Sutton meeting house. Details to follow.

Collected in December

4 Quaker work at home and abroad **31.5 YM 240**

11 Refugee Youth **121 AM 183**

18 South London Area Meeting **31 LM 487**

25 Friends Family Group **36**

Collecting in January: 1 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad, 8 South London Area Meeting, 15 Woodbrooke, 22 Croydon Local Meeting, 29 Tommy's

The deadline for the February edition is Sunday 29 January 2017

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

In looking forward to 2017 with hope, I offer this poem by Emily Dickinson that uses a bird as a symbol:

"Hope" is the thing with feathers

*"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -*

*And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -*

*I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.*