

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

July-August 2021

Dear Friends: We are fast approaching 19 July, the date on the 'roadmap' we all hope will see our lives return to some kind of normality. At this time, early July, we are still not sure how far life will return to normal, as the Delta variant of Covid-19 is multiplying at a rapid rate. But hospital rates are low, and we may find that it is being treated in the same way as flu, in with case we can all carry on as before the outbreak. Or can we? That remains to be seen.

Our Meeting House is open for meetings for worship in person and on Zoom throughout the summer months.

Gillian Turner, David Parlett



We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration for all creatures. And seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation.

Advices and Queries 42

Photo: flowers from the meeting house garden

Words to encourage us in tough times

*June 2020 from A Candle in the Window **

A time to imagine

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine the world anew. This one is no different; it is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks

and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

Arundhati Roy

**A Candle in the Window Hospitality Network is a growing online, worldwide network of Christian households delighting in hospitality. Our hope is to multiply the blessings we have experienced in our own home through hospitality as our members travel, share a meal and open up their homes to one another. (<https://acandle.wildapricot.org/>)*

News of Friends

Rodney Giles (5 December 1936 – 23 April 2021) Rodney's funeral service was held at the parish church of Orlestone St Mary, near Ashford in Kent. Rodney was sixteen when, encouraged by his first cousin Brian Skeet, he came to his first Quaker Meeting, and found it suited his quiet, thoughtful personality. He was educated at Kingston Grammar School, living with his aunt in Cheam since the death of his mother in his early teens. He had one sister, who died age six. He never forgot her, as he wished to be buried with her in the village where they lived. And so six of us made the journey to the tiny church in the Weald for his funeral, conducted by the vicar.

It was a very simple ceremony, with the opening and closing prayers of the C of E funeral service, a reading from St John 14, 1-6, and we listened to the tunes of two hymns while we followed the words on the service sheet. We were not allowed to sing, of course. Brian's daughter Helen chose one of the hymns: *Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy*, with its lovely final verse, so right for Rodney:

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.*

I chose *Dear Lord and Father of mankind*, the Quaker hymn, and read William Penn's words about death in *Quaker Faith and Practice* 22.95, in acknowledgement of Rodney's years as a Quaker. (That he was not formally in membership does not matter. Neither was George Fox.)

He was laid to rest with his sister in the churchyard behind the chapel.

Rodney was unique, as far as I know, as the only person at Croydon Meeting who did his national service in the Friends Ambulance Unit - Post War Service. His joining the unit, after two years of attending Meeting, shows his commitment to pacifism, which, in 1954, must have been very alive among Quakers, so soon after the war. When I arrived in 1966, those same people were still there and must have been hugely influential in Rodney's life: a young man, with a relative who fought in the Royal Air Force, living with his aunt who disapproved of his decision to join. Mark Hayler, a First Year War CO; Eleanor Sawden, whose parents were Quaker missionaries and told us how she had been torpedoed by the Japanese; Win and Reg Porcas, who were firefighters and had white feathers through their letterbox - these would have supported him in his registration as a Conscientious Objector.

By the time Rodney was posted to the FAU, the urgency of dealing with the effects of war at home and overseas and the natural disasters of flooding and earthquakes had eased, and other areas of service were sought for the young men and women, mostly from Quaker homes and schools. This was usually unskilled manual labour with the young people living in hostels or boarding houses. At first he worked, with his group, in East London, sorting through mounds of second-hand clothes and shoes for anything wearable to be given to charity, but then, much more to his taste, to forestry work in Kent. This is described in Roger Bush's *FAU The Third Generation 1946 – 1959*: *'I don't think we did much more than to get along socially with great good humour, living in cold damp huts and working in cold wet woodlands. We were selectively felling and clearing trees and undergrowth in birch heathlands, preparatively to replanting with conifers... The summer task was to spend most of the time bent half double and moving slowly along the rows, cutting down the weeds and trying to persuade the mixed group of Brits, Germans and Israelis not to lop the tops off the pine saplings being grown for telephone poles.'*

This experience, unlikely though it seems, gave Rodney the knowledge that he wanted to spend his life among trees; he spent the rest of his working life working in public parks and woodlands.

His hearing deteriorated as he grew older, he had problems with his rented accommodation, and life became increasingly difficult as he grew older. He continued attending Croydon Meeting until a road accident brought him to the attention of Social Services and he was sent to a care home in Bromley. We kept in touch with him through visits and through his cousin Brian and Helen, Brian's daughter, his only relatives. Eventually he moved to a care home in Ware, to be close to Helen and her partner Ian, and where Brian could visit him.

He died as gently as he lived, a man of integrity and peace, living proof that true Quakers are born, not made into membership.

Brian Skeet is now able to attend meeting for worship in person, greatly to his relief and pleasure. We welcome his return.



Graham Parlett's funeral is to be held at South London Crematorium at 11am on 15 July. In his will he had asked that his funeral should be 'non-religious', but David, who will be the celebrant, believes that a funeral cannot but be religious by definition, and is moved to conduct it after the manner of Friends. *Photo of Graham from unknown photographer*

The Temple not Made with Hands

For the past few months, I have been letting a section of my back garden turn wild. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that I have been trying to turn a section of my back garden into wilderness by force? After all, my

original intention to do absolutely nothing at all has met with obstacles at every turn...

By far the biggest issue is my own impatience. The area had previously been covered by a dilapidated shed and concrete, so the process began with bare earth. Having often admired the beautiful wild verges in our local area, I know that nature will eventually provide something wonderful – just what is needed, in fact.

But I want it to be full of life right now! A perfectly accidental, perfectly colourful, mature garden meadow from day one! And so I find myself caving in, and scattering a wildflower mix to ‘help things along’. Likewise, sowing patches of grass seed to fill stubborn brown patches, doing battle with the ants, and uprooting nettles – until I find that they are brilliant for butterflies, and I’ve been tying myself in knots all along, undoing nature’s good work.

I know there are many keen gardeners and botanical experts in the Meeting, so I am hesitant to admit any of this in print; undoubtedly there are many more flaws in my beginner’s logic than I have yet realised.

Along the way, I’m also learning where some light-touch management might still be a good thing for the wilderness to flourish; I do ultimately want to encourage biodiversity, for example, so some invasive species will need to be kept in check. I have also been pulling vast amounts of plastic out of the soil, which can only be positive.

Nonetheless, recognising a limited place for my own response so easily becomes an excuse to swoop in and try to manage the space entirely.

Perhaps worship is a bit like this? I recently stumbled across a wonderful passage from Thomas R Kelly:

In this humanistic age we suppose man is the initiator and God is the responder. But the living Christ within us is the initiator and we are the responders. God the Lover, the accuser, the revealer of light and darkness presses within us. ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’ And all our apparent initiative is already a response, a testimonial to His secret presence and working within us. The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening. (Qfp, 2.10)

We have surely all experienced how tempting it can be to fill silences with (even metaphorical) sound; how common it is to become distracted in apparently vacant space; how hard it is to maintain a posture of truly expectant waiting. Silent worship is called a discipline for a reason! But underlying this discipline – our method – is the commitment to worship in this way because of our trust in the inevitability of Love emerging. *‘Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.’*

In the same way that I have committed (however imperfectly) to give nature space in my garden because I trust it will be beautiful and necessary, I worship in silence because I trust that God will initiate something wonderful – just what is needed, in fact. I just have to learn to let go.



Photo: Liz Collins

Madeleine Pennington

The Temple not made with Hands, Walter C. Lanyon (Kessinger)

Let It go before us

Lately, owing to the political mis-steps and poor decision-making reported daily in the news, there appears much to criticise and feel sad and angry about. A few week’s ago, Oliver Duff of i@inews wrote of the problems caused to those in political high office by a former special advisor who had decided to leak certain ill-advised, expletive-laden WhatsApp messages allegedly sent by Boris Johnson. (As a point of interest, Duff recalls that, ‘Tony Blair refused to own a mobile phone while

in No10. Wise.')

Revealing a Prime Minister's messages so soon after the event, in this case, an international state of extreme emergency, is quite unprecedented. Duff goes on to wonder optimistically whether if more of these messages are revealed, as is suggested, we may benefit from the hindsight given, 'what more may we find out about the pandemic and how to cope with catastrophes in the future?'

The recent resignation of the Minister for Health, owing supposedly to comprising video footage appearing in the press, has added already to unresolved questions regarding the general handling of the health crisis and related issues such as the awarding of contracts without tender, obscure hiring procedures and undeclared appointments.

Elements of the life of a career politician may indeed be tough but the example set by those who seem to fail to display a reasonable level of honesty and integrity can be very dispiriting. The weekly combative performance by some in the House of Commons where evidence-based argument is often replaced by what some commentators have termed intellectual dishonesty and crimes against logic does not always help to aid the transparency necessary for the development of a sense of confidence in those elected to serve.

We may feel justifiably provoked, but blaming others for deceit and aggression is always an easy win. In 1949 Thomas Merton, the American Trappist monk, theologian and social activist, wrote that we would be far better served by spending time looking within ourselves instead of pointing the finger at others:

'Instead of hating the people you think are warmakers, hate the appetites and disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed - but hate these things in yourself, not in another'.

There is much in *Quaker Faith and Practice* concerning the importance of practising self-reflection before deciding to accuse others of a lack of moral compass. A life of love, peace and tenderness and bearing one with one another was the exquisite advice offered to us by Isaac Pennington in 1667 (Qfp 10.01). The final sentence of *Advices and Queries 17* is the sublime: 'think it possible that you may be mistaken'. In similar vein, *Advices and Queries 32* asks that we think about our own role in encouraging positive relationships between others:

'Bring into God's light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations?'

Examining our own fallibility can be a challenge and it is not necessary that we fall into feelings of paralysing shame, for as the poet Alexander Pope wrote: 'to err is human'. Better that we turn towards a greater and deeper spiritual reality by becoming still and listening inwardly. This may help to illumine consciousness and define responsibilities. In 1961, mystic, teacher and writer Joel Goldsmith gave a talk which contained these words :

'Don't ask the world to be better than it is. Let us individually, release the Prince of Peace within ourselves and let It go before us to do the work. The grace of God does not reach human consciousness by moralising. We must find peace within ourselves and become a centre through which the grace of God can escape to be an invisible Presence that goes before us to 'make the crooked places straight'.

Barbara Earl

www.joelgoldsmith.com [School of thought.org](http://Schoolofthought.org)

Our buildings as we return to meetings in person

Many of us who read this newsletter have not set foot in Croydon Meeting House or the Adult School Hall since the first or second lockdown, and will now be planning to return to worship together. We are planning events in August which will bring us together, and our Area Business Meeting will, we hope, be at the meeting house in September.

As you know, we have spent a lot of time, effort and money on the garden. We have been equally busy with our two buildings, which, being classified as community buildings, have been in use throughout the pandemic. The meeting house re-opened with the local school, Cressey College, continuing to hire our rooms for their vulnerable students; all our other hirers moved to Zoom or stopped meeting. To keep them safe we instituted a strict daily cleaning routine following Government guidelines, and are grateful to Eka Ramarwan for his hard work and dedication to this task. After 17 May, when people were allowed to meet indoors, a very few of our hirers returned – Yoga and the Friends Family Group, plus our youth groups. From hiring out our rooms to a range

of local groups, foster parents, pensioners, bee keepers, Pilates, exercise and yoga groups, we are at present down to one main hirer, Cressey College, who use our rooms, and the ASH, every school day, not just for lessons but for staff meetings and examinations.

It is important, we know, that our meeting house remains a Quaker building, and now that we are allowed to have our books and leaflets on display, we work hard to make this clear. Our next task is to replace the posters that have been up for two years to new ones, and to welcome everyone back to a bright, up-to-date building.

The ASH never closed at all, as Nightwatch continued to serve sandwiches and soup to whoever turned up every evening at Queens Gardens. We have had a couple of films shot there, and have welcomed the Endurance Steel Orchestra and their drums, who use the building as their base.



Mavis Parker sent me this photo (left), writing : *This fell out of a heap of photos of mine. I recall it was a lovely day so Cathy and I decided to have a more adventurous Children's Meeting that Sunday – one of the many happy memories I have of my time as a member of Croydon meeting. I wonder would Health and Safety, have approved of it? My good wishes to all at Croydon Friends Meeting House.*

It is a beautiful photo of the Town Hall, but I fear you would no longer recognise the fountain, or, indeed the area of Queen's garden where it was taken.

GT

Sanctuary Meetings

Our Area Meeting decided in February 2018 to be a Sanctuary Meeting. Croydon and Purley Local Meetings had separately decided to be Sanctuary Meetings because of their relevant projects: Croydon providing a meeting place for local refugees and asylum seekers, and Purley having their Happy Baby project.

In March 2018, Gillian Turner and I were appointed the link persons between the Area Meeting and Tatiana Garavito, the Programme Manager at Friends House. We agreed that Gillian would be the link person for Croydon and Purley, and I would keep Sutton and Streatham & Brixton, as well as Epsom, in touch. Since then I have passed copies of all communications from Tatiana to Phil Laurence for Sutton and Sarah Totterdell for Streatham & Brixton. However, there has been nothing to pass on since February 2020 because Tatiana was furloughed – she is now leaving and will not be replaced.

I attended a Zoom webinar on Saturday 3rd July arranged by QPSW on the subject 'Celebrating Sanctuary', which was attended by about 30 people. I think I was the only person from South London Area Meeting. I was very impressed by the work being done by Meetings all over the country, and particularly by the work of QARN (the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network) which I have now joined. Anyone else can be added to their mailing list by emailing info@qarn.org.uk and stating your local Meeting.

The fact that there will no longer be a Programme Manager for this BYM project does not mean the end of the project:

1. QPSW will help Area Meetings to speak publicly, they will have access to decision-makers, but the practical work will be the responsibility of Area and Local Meetings. There will be no involvement of BYM staff in projects.
2. Philip Wood, of QPSW staff, will continue in post until 31.12.21. He will co-ordinate a list of resources e.g. training events, and list other organisations working with refugees.
3. After the end of this year, there will be a review of BYM support for local work generally.

We were reminded that Woodbrooke as well as QARN are available for support: QARN will supply speakers if requested.

Barbara Cairns

Brummana High School

Our collection on 20 June was for Brummana High School in Lebanon, a school we have supported for many years. You may have read the article about the school in *The Friend* on 2 July about the importance of the school, which continues to educate over 1,250 Lebanese students

towards creating future leaders who can take the country forward. You may also have read in *The Guardian* an article entitled 'This is the end of times: Lebanon struggles to find political path through its crisis'. The financial situation is dire, the Lebanese Lira is in freefall, and inflation has sky-rocketed. The school is surviving on its reserves and donations in its effort to support students whose parents were killed or injured in the explosion in March 2020, whose houses were demolished, who lost their jobs. Damaged hospitals have closed and medical staff left the country. The government is corrupt and powerless. My friends on the staff tell me that every member of staff who can leave the country is doing so and is being replaced by teachers from schools that are closing down. There are severe shortages of medication, gasoline, electricity. and essential foods including bottled water and baby milk powder. There is a rush to emigrate, and the suffering of the poor and the refugees housed in tents in the mountains is immense.

Croydon Meeting responded generously to the appeal before Christmas. Further donations can be sent to 'The Quaker International Educational Trust' or to 'QuiET'. Cheques or charity vouchers should have 'BHS' written on the back. To make a direct payment to our bank account, or to set up a regular standing order, our bank details are: CAF Bank Ltd, 25 Kings Hill Ave, West Malling, Kent ME19 4JQ; Account name: Quaker International Educational Trust; Sort Code: 40-52-40; Account no: 00006239. Please use 'BHS' as the payment reference and email treasurer@quietcharity.co.uk. Thank you.

Gillian Turner

Forthcoming collections

July 11 Claridge House, **18** Open, **25** Britain Yearly Meeting, **Aug 01** Croydon Local Meeting, **08** The Retreat, York, **15** Croydon Refugee Centre, **22** South East Cancer Help Centre, **29** Mind in Croydon, **Sep 05** South London Area Meeting,

The deadline for the September edition is 29 August 2021
Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner Tel 07805087981 email
gillianturner033@gmail.com

The Road Not Taken

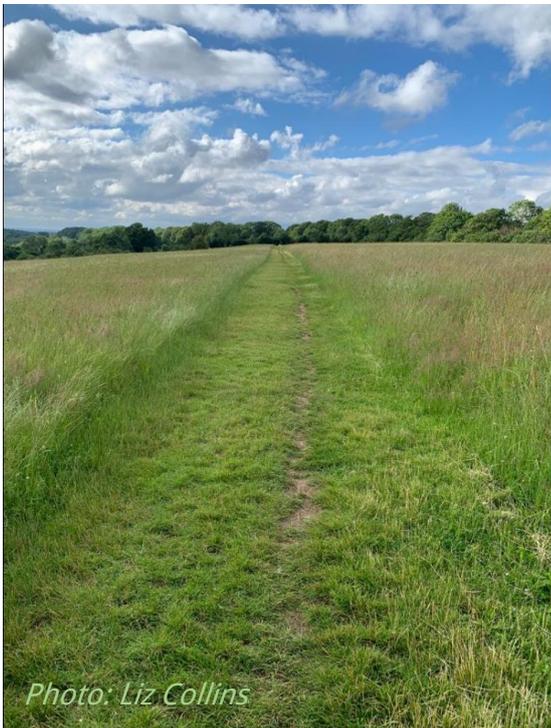


Photo: Liz Collins

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveller, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth;
 Then took the other, as just as fair,
 And having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
 Though as for that the passing there
 Had worn them really about the same,
 And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back.
 I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
 I took the one less travelled by,
 And that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost