

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

November 2016

Dear Friends

What a busy month October turned out to be even up to the 30th of the month! There are reports of the various activities below, not all of which were mentioned in last month's newsletter. I suspect November will be a more settled month, with only the events listed in the calendar actually taking place. However, we live adventurously as a meeting as well as individuals, so it will be interesting to see what surprises await us.

Gillian Turner

MEETINGS

*And so we sat down together
We shared understandings, misunderstandings,
We hoped for definitions, but did not find them.
We brought questions, long sculptured
in the studios of our days, and tried to chisel meanings
in the workshops of our nights.
We wanted some response, oh some response.
Perhaps some came, somehow.
Some illumination, some passing cloud.
Some thunder came and departed
echoing our confusion. We shared
impossible thoughts, unbelievable words,
nightmares and daydreams.
We dared a touch of recognition.
Now we shall take leave of each other.
We shall bear on our shoulders,
sacks of reflection, suitcases of silence,
as heavy and as light as Christmas presents.
One day we shall unwrap them:
a kaleidoscope, a fountain,
a waterfall of glory,
all shades of the rainbow -
when the heart is ripe like an apple
and the season is golden and ready.
Oh give us the ripeness.
Oh bless us our seasons. Harvey Gilman*

A Meeting with Meister Eckhart: "God is at home, it is we who have gone out for a walk"

As a student of The Infinite Way, I knew that Joel Goldsmith held Meister Eckhart, the 13th century German, Dominican mystic, theologian and preacher in the highest esteem. Also, I had heard that Eckhart Tolle the author of *The Power of Now* had taken his name in homage to his predecessor. Other than that, my knowledge of him was negligible. When an opportunity came up to attend a course about Eckhart von Hochheim, facilitated by a member of the Eckhart Society, I jumped at the chance to attend. To study his work is, of course, the work of a life-time, so I only offer humbly a few of my impressions of the course.

At 15, Eckhart was thought to have joined the learned order of Dominicans and studied in Paris and Cologne. As an exceedingly able administrator, organiser and pastoral head, he rose to hold many high offices including Prior of Erfurt and Provincial of Saxony where he was in charge of 47 convents. In 1311, he was invited to become Parisian Professor of Theology and to teach for a second period, a rare honour only given previously to Thomas Aquinas, who along with Albert the Great was a great influence upon Eckhart.

Eckhart's work is felt by some to be both spiritually demanding and challenging. Certainly, there were many of his Franciscan contemporaries who felt that his radical and mystical insights

came close to heresy. His belief that each one must make space to look within to find God and pray with a bare, free and unconditioned mind did not always sit well with the more traditional authorities of his day. Eckhart taught his groups of novices and students that “God lies in wait” for us to grow towards him and that if we could accustom ourselves to having God always present in our disposition and intention, “no-one could come between you and the God who is present to you”. (*Talks and Instructions* 6). He saw obedience in the Latin sense of the word as “near hearing” (*obaudire*), to bring hearing into oneself. Much like, perhaps, the intention of a gathered Quaker meeting.

To Eckhart, prayer should be a seeking to know God's will alone, untied to self- interest, will and material desires. One should abandon oneself, resign oneself and look for the quiet place within, the “desert”. Prayer should not be for any transitory thing, one translator came up with the following:

*If I pray for aught, I get naught,
If I pray for naught, I pray as I ought.*

Eckhart preached that not one of us was coarse-grained or feeble enough not to come to know that “the joy is in you”. Reminiscent of Luke 17, “The kingdom of God is in you”, he spoke of the “scintilla”, the twinkling spark within.

In 1326, Eckhart was called to an Inquisition by the Conservative Archbishop of Cologne to answer for his teachings and theological writing. Eckhart objected and appealed to Pope John XXII to hear his case. This was agreed and he walked the 500 long miles to Avignon to stand before the Papal inquiry. 28 of his 108 articles were objected to by the Pope, who, incidentally, was later accused of heresy.

Eckhart died in Avignon while the inquiry was still in session. He was never himself condemned as a heretic.

“Be sure of this: absolute stillness for as long as possible is best of all for you.” (German Sermon 4 *trans.* Walshe.)

“Meister Eckhart: Sermons and Treatises” *trans.* Walshe

“Meditations with Meister Eckhart,” Matthew Fox
Eckhartsociety.org

Barbara Earl

News of Friends

Welcome: Champa Sadler

We welcome Champa Sadler, a member of Carlisle Meeting, who started a new job in South London recently.

Champa's interests include beekeeping and gardening, especially community gardens and allotments. She was a bell-ringer at her local church in Carlisle, racing from ringing the chimes for morning service to meeting for worship. She has been accepted as a bell-ringer at Croydon's Minster, and plans to repeat the pattern, unfortunately missing breakfast, though not refreshments afterwards and the chance to wash up!

Farewell: Robert Silver

We have missed Robert, the Friend who regularly attended Meeting in his wheelchair, since his death in August.

Anthea and I attended the Requiem Mass at St John the Evangelist Church which he had requested. He was a regular worshipper at the Church, and was known by many, so there was a fairly large congregation, but few cars, suggesting most were from the vicinity.

We learnt more of Robert's life from the two eulogies given by his friends. He was an actor, who, no doubt, would have made his name professionally had it not been for his increasingly poor health, which had been exacerbated by a leg injury caused in an accident. He had been blest with a strong voice, and stood as a Liberal MP in Streatham in the 60s, doing very well and gaining second place in the election.

It was the first time we had been in the Church - a towering building which I had passed many times on my way home from work. It was an inspiring occasion for both of us, meeting in the Lady

Chapel and, interestingly, sitting sideways to the Altar – we noticed, with some sadness, the photograph of Robert, as a younger man in his prime on his coffin. The Mass lasted an hour and ten minutes, which we followed on the 20 page Order of Service.

At the end we shook hands (or embraced) saying ‘Peace be with you’ and adjourned to the back of the Church for coffee and cakes.

Wilf Hayler

November 1916

My Father was still at home for the remainder of 1916, and involved with working for peace. In mid-November there was a two day event at Croydon Meeting House at which Edward Grubb was much in evidence.

Edward Grubb (1854-1939) was probably the best known Quaker to attend Croydon Meeting. He is described as ‘a major leader of British Quakerism, a prolific religious author, a key member of many religious and social welfare organizations, including the No Conscription Fellowship. His absolute pacifist stance was born from the disillusionment of the Boer War’.

One of the meetings included a talk by Tom Richardson, MP for Whitehaven on ‘Peace by Negotiation’, where Harold Bing, a Unitarian and well-known in the peace movement also spoke.

Another event in November was the case of Arthur Plater at Croydon Borough Police Court, who had gone blind with the five weeks awaiting arrest – he was sent to Kingston but released the next day and put in ‘C3 class’, gradually recovering his sight when he knew the outcome.

My Father was still looking for a job, however temporary and was sent to Messrs Sears, Builders, but they wanted a labourer’

To end the month, a visit to Streatham to hear H S Flewker speaking on ‘John Drinkwater Poet – a good subject for a temperance man!’

WEFH

Trouble of soul can teach us things that raptures never could – not only patience, but humility and sympathy with others. (Edward Grubb-1933 Qfp 21.12)

Plain Quakers: For Conscience’ Sake

On Friday 21 October a group of us attended the play written and performed by Mike Casey and Arthur Pritchard. It was very enjoyable and gave rise to interesting discussion afterwards.

The play portrayed the problems faced by conscientious objectors at the introduction of conscription in 1916 and the response of young Quakers to the question of war service.

They used a simple set of table and chairs in the meeting room, with the chairs laid out as for meeting for worship. Because the action moved from the present to the past and back again, an clarinet was used to indicate the time shift. The theme of the play came to life in the portrayal of the characters - Morris, unravelling the truth of his grandfather’s and great-uncle’s exploits in the Great War so that he could pass on this family history to his grandson, and his friend Albert, a Quaker enthusiast. The play was set in Huddersfield, where there had been fierce opposition to the war among radical groups, and afterwards in discussion they commented on the fact that Croydon too had been a centre of opposition, and were delighted to meet Wilf Hayler and to learn more about Mark.

It was a great pleasure to have this performance take place at Croydon Meeting, and was much enjoyed by those who came. There was a retiring collection on behalf of Quaker peace and Social Witness.

“Not in Our Name”

I felt very humbled by my visit to Friends’ Meeting in Croydon on the Sunday at the end of October when visiting my son and his partner nearby. It was on a day when there was a shared gathering with a Turkish group with bridges being built between different faiths, and I also heard of the work being done to help the homeless and refugees there. I come from a small rural meeting (Briggflatts in Cumbria (1652 Country)) which does not have to so directly face the complexities and challenges of living in our country’s highly populated capital city.

Much is clearly being done in the name of Quakers. All over the country I know there are many Friends, attenders and meetings working hard to put their faith into practice, which is what drew me to Quakers 35 years ago.

I am now involved in a group called “Not in Our Name,” a group I would like to tell you a little about. The phrase “Not in Our Name” has been borrowed from Northern Friends’ Peace Board to express their opposition to the Iraq War. We felt there were now things happening in society which we should also be opposing.

The “Not in Our Name” group began at a Southern Marches Area Meeting camp over a year ago and was established in Kendal Area Meeting inspired by Tim Nicholls who was at the camp. There some Friends discussed feeling depressed about and frustrated with the increasing erosion of the welfare state that an earlier generation fought so hard to build. This was a generation who had been driven by the notion that we are interdependent as a society and that it is our responsibility to support the more vulnerable and redress the gross inequalities within society. Equality and justice are at the heart of Quakerism but it was felt we were not speaking out strongly or loudly enough against this erosion and for the protection of something so socially valuable.



Brigflatts meeting house, Cumbria

Thanks to the support of Kendal Area Meeting, the growing “Not in Our Name” group has recently worked with “Turning the Tide” to consider how we might turn this concern into action. We explored our wish to give voice to messages which counter some of the notions gathering force in society and be seen to give wider witness to what is enshrined in Quaker testimonies. Whilst continuing to work to help those in need, both through our occupations and voluntary work, we decided we wanted to try to challenge what seems like an increasingly prevailing ethos of personal greed and selfishness, to challenge the seemingly prevailing idea that people’s worth should be measured by their economic capability, by the money they earn and what they have. We want to challenge the apparent creeping individualism and the gathering notion that taxation is only a necessary evil. We want to promote the idea of working together for the common good.

One of the ways we plan to get our voice and message heard is to organise a march/pilgrimage over four days in the lead up to the Thursday before Easter with people walking as far and as long as they are able to our nearest tax office in Barrow; our message will be that our welfare state deserves protecting and tax is more than a necessary evil but for the good of all, that it is better to pay more for a healthy and effective welfare system rather than have extra pounds in our own pockets.

Any Quakers are welcome to join us, but even better would be if similar actions took place all over the country so there is a collective bearing of witness to what is at the heart of our faith, that of God in everyone, the right of all to be considered worthy of consideration and support. If you are interested in this, please do contact me on justsally1961@gmail.com, and I or another member of the group will contact you with details of our plans and support if you wish to do similar elsewhere.

Sally Ingham

The Quaker Experience

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.

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

"**The Quaker Experience**" was the title of the Open Afternoon exhibition held in the Adult School Hall on Saturday 8 October at the end of this year's Quaker Week. It consisted chiefly of posters, leaflets and documents descriptive of Quaker life, with particular attention drawn to the centrality of meeting for worship and to the value of *Advices & Queries*. We also held at hourly intervals three 20-minute "taster" meetings for worship in the meeting room of the main building, each preceded by a short introduction and followed by questions and discussion. Although we only had about 20 visitors in all we felt that the event was very warm, friendly and lively. The three meetings for worship gradually increased in size, the last of them attended by about six Friends and visitors and followed by some worthwhile questions and discussion. I hope that next year's event will follow a similar pattern but that preparations will be started much earlier in the year, especially as regards publicity.

DP

A Vision for Croydon Meeting?

On 23 October Eleri Pengelly from Purley Meeting came to speak to us after Meeting for Worship about the work they have done on developing a vision for Purley Meeting (see the October newsletter for the background).

Eleri explained that, a few years ago, Purley Meeting had been concerned about their financial deficit and about their falling membership (at one time they had only six worshippers. They had met together for a 'brainstorming' session about what to do and had come up with all sorts of creative ideas, but could not follow them all up with such a small membership. They had then held a series of sessions in their regular monthly Sunday discussion group, based on the study materials 'Let your Spirit Fly'. Eleri said that this had been 'brilliant', as it allowed space for open-ended discussion. They had benefited from the experience of some 'weighty' Friends at the time and had the opportunity to share what the Meeting meant to them and to practise communicating why they were Quakers. They had subsequently worked together on developing a 'vision' for Purley Meeting. This led to a focus on increasing the spiritual impact of the Meeting in the Purley community.

Over the next few years, sadly they lost some members, but they also gained some new members and attenders and there has been a modest increase in numbers. They decided that they should have a regular Children's Meeting, even though they had no children at the time, and they now have a few children attending.

Following their more recent discussions, members are clear that they value the fellowship and relationships they find in Purley Meeting as a Quaker community and that it should continue. The view about the site was less clear-cut. They have a Meeting House with a resident warden and most of their costs related to these. They loved their Meeting House and it had become clear that the financial deficit was not as great as it had at first appeared. They have focused on increasing income from hiring out rooms and now they almost break even, when the 'quota' paid to Six Weeks Meeting (which manages Meeting Houses in the London area) is taken into account. All members are now quite clear about the financial position of the Meeting. However it is more of a concern that a great deal of their time and energy goes into just keeping the premises and hirings going. They are still considering the options for the future of the site.

I am grateful to Eleri for giving up her time to share the experience of Purley Friends with us so openly. I found this very thought-provoking and wonder whether Croydon Friends would find a similar series of sessions helpful in discerning the way forward for Croydon Meeting? (Other materials are available apart from 'Let your Spirit Fly', if members and attenders would like to take this forward). Please let me know.

Rhiannon Rees, Clerk

Croydon Nightwatch Harvest Appeal

The appeal went much the same as in previous years, about 8000 tins, with insufficient soup than we need to last us the full year. The packaged food was more than last year which we will concentrate on delivering asap.

We had a committee meeting last night and our financial position is not as solid as at the beginning of the year. This is as a result of a high demand for resettlement, ie furniture, cookers etc., and a reduction in donations. We are going to curtail the resettlement at the moment (we have done this before) and look closely at other spending on clothing and food purchases (we have been buying fruit, and cakes). Its not the end of the world, and we are taking steps to control things (its **happened before!**).

Roger Davies (Nightwatch trustee)

Refugee Youth Group

A group of about 25 teenage refugees, who came to England as unaccompanied minors, now meet once a week with their volunteers in the Adult School Hall. They start off at 6pm with an hour of music and dance while a small team prepares their evening meal, which they eat together in the common room. Boys prepare, cook and wash up afterwards one week, girls the next. Their mentor Federico, who is employed by Refugee Youth, arrives with a large carrier bag of vegetables and fruit, and the young people produce a large pot of vegetarian rice and a curry.

They set the tables in the common room with bowls, plates and cutlery and leave both rooms spotless. They depart about 9pm, happy to have spent the evening together and to have been able to raise any difficulties with their adult volunteers.

Federico reports that they love the space in the ASH where they can let off steam, and treasure the time when they sit together and share, not only a meal, but their worries. He says that, if we had not provided them with this place they would most likely be hanging about in the town, getting into trouble as they are so young and vulnerable.

Filming at the Adult School Hall

Unexpectedly on Thursday 20 October, I was asked to organise the filming on the following Tuesday of a single to be broadcast on the BBC in aid of Children in Need. This would be from 7am to 8pm, to take place in the ASH but spilling over into the car park and the meeting room.

I had worked with this producer before, when she filmed Birdie's latest single in February, so knew what was needed, and all the paperwork, insurance etc, was organised by the location agency.

At 7am, on the dot, a very large lorry bearing the generator manoeuvred into the car park and parked outside the meeting house, closely followed by vans with the lighting equipment to be set

up in the car park, the recording equipment for the hall, the space heater to take away the chill, the baby grand piano in two crates, and refreshments for the crew in the meeting house kitchen.

At 8.30 the hirers who use the car park started arriving. They had all been forewarned, and because it was half term the usual number was halved. It was all rather of a squash, with only the spaces by the wall available, and some nifty parking skills were called for. However, knowing it was for Children in Need made everyone cheerful, and I was able to impress them with the name of the celebrity, Craig David, who was to sing.

Next came the orchestra, tucked away to practise in the common room, and the stylists, awaiting Craig in the East Room where, fortunately, we have a full-length mirror, but no clothes rail, so they had to bring their own.

12.00 brought the first of the yoga groups to the meeting room, first Crisis, then Active and Upright, then Crisis again, picking their way from the pedestrian gate past the lorry. In the afternoon the popstar arrived in his limo. I had gone home by then, leaving them all to it, so was relieved to hear that he hadn't been accompanied by an entourage of minders, as there was nowhere they could park.

I was told that the musicians and singer would finish at 6, so at 6.30 went back, to find that they, and Pudsey, were having a final take, while the limo to bear Craig David away was parked across four car park spaces, and the SUV for the musicians was blocking the gate. The Speechmasters' Association were due to have their meeting in the common room at 7, and the neonatal yoga group at 7.30 in the meeting room, so I was not best pleased to find that the BBC had set up an interview in the vestibule, completely blocking the front door. Somehow the speechmakers found their way in through the back door, and by the time the pregnant ladies arrived the worst was over at the front door and everyone was packing up.

By 8.30 everyone had gone, leaving behind the piano and the space heater in the ASH, and a large bag of rolls and croissants in the kitchen for Nightwatch, And by 9, as we ushered out the pregnant ladies and locked up the meeting house, I was buoyed by the thought that the letting had recompensed Six Weeks Meeting for having to mend the hole in the ASH roof as well as other maintenance work.

The piano and space heater were long gone before the Zumba class arrived next day and the young people came for their club on Friday, and each night the Nightwatch volunteers arrive to make ready their soup and sandwiches, fruit and cake, for the homeless in Queen's Garden.

Gillian Turner

Goings-on...

Sunday 6 November: Area Meeting Committee - special meeting at Sutton meeting house after mfw to assist Standing Committee on Nominations.

Sunday 6: Croydon meeting for worship for business from 12:15pm.

Wednesday 9: Embodying Equality in Business - Why & how? Quakers and Business Group Conference 2016. Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ, 9:30am to 10:00am Registration and Networking. 10:00am meeting for worship (10 minute) 4:30 Close.

Thursday 10: Prevention of Modern Slavery in Croydon 09:00 – 13:00 (Registration from 08:45) Croydon Conference Centre, Surrey Street, CR0 1RGI.

Saturday-Sunday 12 and 13: Land for What? Resource For London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PAA. Collaborative event for learning about and challenging the way land is owned, controlled and used in the UK and beyond. Register on-line at www.landforwhat.org.uk

Tuesday 15 November: What is peace? Faiths Together in Croydon event for Interfaith Week at St Michael's Hall, 8 Poplar Walk, West Croydon. 7-9pm (doors open for registration 6.30pm)

Tuesday 15: CTSL supporting refugees 7pm, Trinity House, Chapel Court, SE1. Churches Together in South London will be sharing stories of positive action in South London and providing practical insight into how to help with community sponsorship of newly arrived people. Come early to network over a sustainable buffet served from 6pm.

Thursday 24: "This is a Coup" (film) 7:30pm (?) at Sutton mh. Sutton meeting's 'People and Planet' group are planning to join Sutton Peace and Justice Group for a showing of a film "This is a Coup" – a thought-provoking analysis of Greece's confrontation with international finance in 2015. Book your seat at sutton4peace@yahoo.co.uk.

Sunday 27: Area Meeting At Streatham meeting house following mfw and a picnic lunch.

Sunday 11 December (probably): Christmas Sharing of Words and Music To be agreed at business meeting on November.

Sunday 18 December (probably): Additional business meeting To deal with nominations and appointments.

A memorial meeting for Betty Ellis will be held on Saturday 21 January.

*Breakfast every Sunday morning from 9 to 10 am.
Please join us for muesli, toast and coffee. Coffee available until 10.15*

Collected in October

2 Quaker work at home and abroad **£10**

9 South London Area Meeting **£27**

16 Croydon Sickle Cell and Thalassæmia Support Group **£116**

23 Hlekweni Quaker Training Centre, Zimbabwe **£140**

30 Homeless Floating Shelter **£101.50**

A retiring collection following the performance of *For Conscience Sake* (p.4) raised £175.00 for QPSW as a contribution to their peace work.

Collecting in November: **6** Croydon Nightwatch, **13** Quaker work at home and abroad, **20** South London Area Meeting, **27** Freedom from Torture

The deadline for the December edition is **Sunday 27 November 2016**

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



WHITE POPPIES

**will be available at the
meeting house as usual**