

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

November 2020

Dear Friends We hope, as always, you enjoy reading our November issue which comes with special greetings to our readers who are unable to join us on Zoom. November is such a 'no' month. We hope that something you read here gives you a 'yes' moment. **Gillian and David**

Advices and Queries 10

Come regularly to meeting for worship even when you are angry, depressed, tired or spiritually cold. In the silence ask for and accept the prayerful support of others joined with you in worship. Try to find a spiritual wholeness which encompasses suffering as well as thankfulness and joy. Prayer, springing from a deep place in the heart, may bring healing and unity as nothing else can. Let meeting for worship nourish your whole life. **Chosen by Julia Abley**

News of Friends

Joyce Trotman was 93 on 22 October! Here she is standing in her doorway in the sun. The photo was taken by one of her neighbours for whom she has just finished knitting a baby blanket, as she has done for all babies born in her road.

*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength;
They will soar on wings like eagles;
They will run and not grow weary;
They will walk and not grow faint. Isaiah 40 31*

Bob Rogers: Eleri Pengelly has just notified us that our Friend Bob Rogers, our AM MfS representative, died on the evening of Wednesday 28 October. Linda (his wife) and Lisa (his daughter) were with him and he was relaxed and peaceful. Before his move to Redhill Bob was a member of Pickering and Hull AM. He later became a great friend to Purley Meeting, as well as having friends in other meetings in SLAQM and beyond. We understand that a funeral after the manner of Friends will eventually take place but as yet it is too early for further details.

Reflecting experiences

When I am cautious and worrying about the right decision (as if there is just one right decision), I get comfort from readings that reflect the experiences of others:

A favourite reading from *Quaker Faith and Practice*:

I am not going to wait until I have fathomed all mysteries and secret lore before I begin to live. It has been my good fortune often to be in company with great souls, who have not only helped me in my intellectual quest for truth about religion, but have always encouraged me to strive towards experience, towards belief in religion...' (*QFP 26:10, Francis H Knight*)

It reminds me to get on with life and just experience each up and down and to stop looking for perfection. Similar advice comes from the following quotations that were sent to me by Buddhist friends:

'...throw away the idea that you need to pause your life until you are fully healed... real progress happens when you make better decisions in the midst of living, you can simultaneously heal your past while being open to the present.' (Yung Pueblo) 'Sometimes



you get what you want. Other times, you get a lesson in patience, timing, alignment, empathy, compassion, faith, perseverance, resilience, humility, trust, meaning, awareness, resistance, purpose, clarity, grief, beauty, and life. Either way, you win.' (Brianna Wiest)

The last quotation is a reminder that every difficult experience teaches me something and can use it as a tool to grow. Each experience, whether I have labelled it good or bad, is a part of life and adds to the rich patchwork of life. I have often wanted to make a patchwork quilt - but perhaps that is what I am doing with my life.

Pam Sellman

Just thinking...

These last few weeks have felt stressful and full of concern for others. Listening to the radio plus news of Friends has made me feel anxious about the future. How will it be? How long, etc, etc.?

Getting to meeting for worship on Sunday was a hopeful experience, despite small numbers actually there... it felt so right - wonderful hearing others via Zoom and telephone that gave the feeling of community worshipping together .

Thankyou Friends.

Won't it be wonderful that ONE day we may not wear face covering?

Keep smiling, keep safe also sane.

Margie Ashley

A Standing Ground

Flee fro the presse, and dwelle with sothfastnesse;
Suffyce unto thy thyng, though hit be smal...

However just and anxious I have been,
I will stop and step back
from the crowd of those who may agree
with what I say, and be apart.
There is no earthly promise of life or peace
but where the roots branch and weave
their patient silent passages in the dark;
uprooted, I have been furious without an aim.
I am not bound for any public place,
where I have planted vines and orchard trees,
and in the heat of the day climbed up
Into the healing shadow of the woods.
Better than any argument is to rise at dawn
and pick dew-wet red berries in a cup.

Wendell Berry

The Father is on His Way Out

One of artist and writer Charlie Mackesy's most significant works is his stunning bronze sculpture called *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. I have a postcard of the piece and although dog-eared it is very precious to me. The piece is a wonderful depiction of the love and forgiveness at the exquisite moment of reunion in the well-known parable of redemption. It is a representation of the father welcoming and embracing his errant son who returns home destitute and in rags having spent his inheritance. The father is full of joy as he envelops his boy gently whilst displaying not one ounce of anger or judgement towards him. The young man's utter exhaustion and relief at being forgiven so completely can be seen in the weary and bone-tired hang of his arms. He didn't even have to face the shame of having to announce himself at his father's property for 'When he was yet a great



way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him'. (Luke 15:17-20) Some have said that the implication here is that the father must have made a habit of looking out for his youngest in the hope of spotting him on his return.

This work of art, which stands seven feet on a plinth can be seen at Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican Church in Knightsbridge, London. Also, we are very lucky to have a most beautiful and expressive painting of the same subject by our Friend Mary Clarke. It can be seen displayed proudly on the wall by the main stairs in the Meeting House. Some years ago, I remember hearing with great interest from Mary that she had used members of her own family as models for her work.

Perhaps in our humanity we embody traits of each of the characters in the parable. We may have within us the recklessness and wastefulness of the younger son, the jealousy, rejection and anger of the older brother and the devotion and understanding of the father. Like the other two 'redemption' parables told by Jesus (the lost sheep and the lost coin) there is a deeper meaning beneath the narrative. In *The New Man*, Maurice Nicholl writes that parables contain an inner psychological significance far removed from their literal meaning. We may gain more spiritual discernment by understanding the stories in a metaphorical sense.

In *Leave Your Nets*, Joel Goldsmith focuses upon the idea that we are all 'prodigals' at times as this state is 'a sense of separation from God' whereas to return to the Father's house is 'but a remembrance that God is our selfhood' and true identity and being. At his lowest ebb, all monies spent, tired, alone and working as a swineherd, the prodigal remembered his father. Thoughts of his true place and everything to which he was heir prompted him to begin his journey home. A warm welcome and a sumptuous feast greeted the return. Instead of censure and rejection, the best robe was set around his shoulders and a ring placed on his hand, demonstrating his father's full acceptance and delight in him.

Goldsmith assures us that in stillness and confidence, we too can return to the Father's house and receive the same gifts of love and forgiveness. Of most comfort, is the idea that even while we are quite a distance away from the realisation of it, 'the Father is on His way out' to meet us.

Leave your Nets, Joel Goldsmith (HarperOne)

The New Man, Maurice Nicholl (Stuart)

Charlie Mackesy

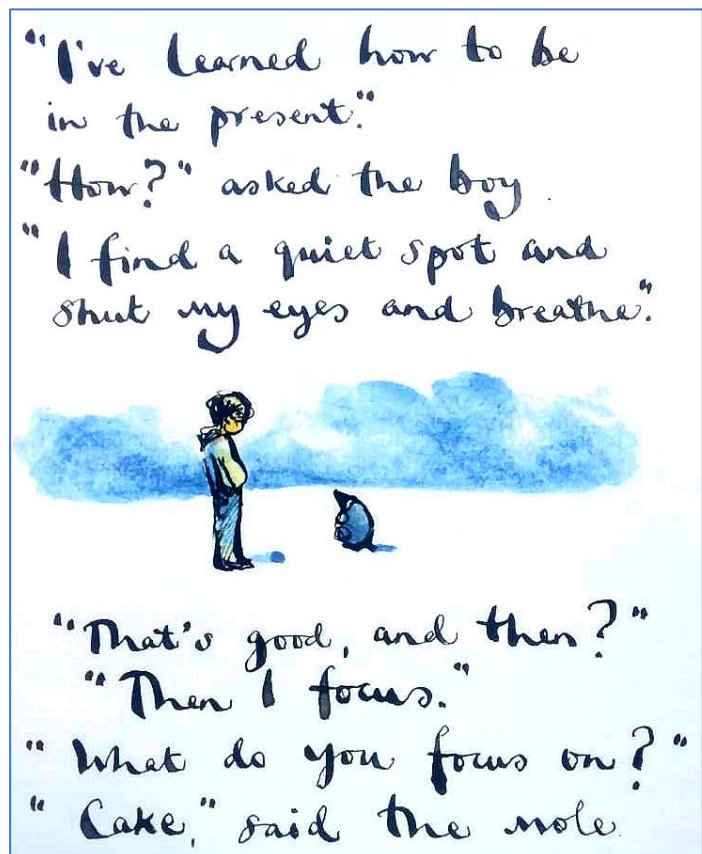
I know that Charlie's book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* is a great favourite with our Friends at Croydon Meeting and is used in many Primary Schools as it highlights so beautifully the importance of kindness and helping each other.

Charlie has been a cartoonist for *The Spectator* and an illustrator for the Oxford University Press. As a world-class artist, his work hangs in private collections (Whoopi Goldberg and Sting have his works), prisons, galleries, churches and women's safe houses around the world.

He works in his home and studio near Brixton and has been escribed as unorthodox and unconventional. I have read that he is an atheist turned evangelist.

Barbara Earl

p.2: Return of the Prodigal Son; right:: page from The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse



Autumn Delight in the Lee Valley

It is very hard to resist Gillian if you're a pushover like me. Perhaps I'm not alone here? So, at the considerable risk of over-exposing myself, this is about three delightful days in Lee Valley last week.

I've been curious since childhood about the paradoxes expressed in parables - that material wealth or status can lead to poverty, spiritually. And that being full may become an inner emptiness if the fullness is not of things that nourish the soul. And vice versa.

A surprise for me this year has been that when my work has reduced the increased mental space and time has filled me with good things I never had the patience for before.

So having recently joined the RSPB I went off excitedly to the Lee Valley YH for an autumn break. To the usual welcoming ways of youth hostels and a private *en suite* room in one of the lodges there. Nestling between the railway line and a corridor of Lee Valley Country Park to the west, and the River Lee and lakes and the rest of the country park to north, east and south it was clearly a little piece of heaven.

The country park an extensive network of lakes and waterways interwoven by walking and cycling paths. Between trees, open areas, marshland and margins of undergrowth. With plenty of birds to exercise and extend my interest and binocular skills. And Rye Meads RSPB reserve to cycle to a few miles north.

It was a perfect antidote to the limitation, suspense and shifting sands of Covid-19 times. From it I feel rich and deeply satisfied- with something lasting - without actually leaving London. And that's what surprises me most.



Life in the Slow Lane (photo by Katharine)

Katharine Locke

What the Quakers have learned (and so can teach) about discernment

In an unlikely turn of events, XR rebels turned up at David Attenborough's house in protest this week. 'Unlikely' because Attenborough needs no convincing when it comes to the need to act on the climate emergency – but he did recently express ambivalence towards campaigning tactics which involve breaking the law, and a group of frustrated rebels personally delivered a 'starter pack on nonviolent civil disobedience' to his front door in response. His daughter asked them to leave, and their protest was criticised by many as a misjudgement of the public mood.

Extinction Rebellion is often accused of misjudging things, and that is not surprising given that they have no centralised leadership structure. They are clear that anyone can protest under an XR banner if they 'agree with their basic principles', and this is a liberating and hopeful vision of human collaboration at best – but it is also clearly a high-risk approach if the movement wants to avoid bad press.

From a historical perspective, the parallels with early Quakerism are striking – and as it happens, the 364th anniversary of our own most famous misjudgement of public mood also fell this week. On 24 October 1656, James Nayler entered Bristol on horseback as a recreation of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Nayler was convicted of blasphemy, and his reputation in the Society has only been revisited and reclaimed in recent decades.

Nayler's entry into Bristol was shocking to the public, and made life more difficult for Quakers at the time, but it wasn't just a PR issue: it was also a relational and even a theological one. After all, if anybody can act in whatever way the 'basic principles' lead them, what happens when individual leading is seemingly at odds with the sense of the wider group? Whose

interpretation of the principles counts? We are told in the Peace Testimony that ‘the Spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable’ – but whose vision prevails when two people claim to be led in different directions? And who decides how best to apply basic principles when the situation changes, requiring a new approach? As a political movement, XR doesn’t claim the authority of Christ; its principles are instead based on a particular political situation now. But as that situation changes, will XR’s political demands remain the same? Will their principles be unchanging in 50 years? And if not, who gets to decide what they will be?

Quakers understood these tricky issues from the very start. As early as 1653, the Quaker preacher William Dewsbury recommended that ‘one or two Friends who are most grown in the power and life, in the pure discerning in the Truth’ should be appointed to ‘take care and charge over the flock of God’. This was only one year after George Fox gathered the first Seekers in Westmorland, when Quakerism was barely a movement at all. Moving forward, Fox himself led a campaign to consolidate the system of area and regional meetings in 1666-67. The ‘Second Day Morning Meeting’ was established in 1673 to check (and if necessary, censor) any material published on the Quakers’ behalf. And the Wilkinson-Story dispute in the 1670s was sparked by opposition to the establishment of a separate Women’s Meeting, but also provoked angry criticism of the generally increasing power of elders and ministers at the time. In response to these criticisms, William Penn defended the consolidation of group authority, arguing that any opposition to the need for accountability rested on a sense that ‘the Light [was] inconsistent with itself, or admitted... not only different but contrary practices in the one family and flock of God.’

These measures weren’t about controlling people’s impulses, or seizing power over those who were less assertive or privileged. Rather, they were an affirmation that pastoral care and group discernment was a necessary part of the equation, if Quakers were to maintain some degree of collective vision and fellowship. They were an affirmation that Truth existed – that of God within was the real authority – and the Quakers were just trying to discern it.

Quakers have always seen discernment as something done together, and this is more important than ever given the rise of social media disinformation and a corrosion of ‘truth’ in our public debates today. There is a difference between a community that simply confirms and reinforces individual biases and misconceptions – an echo chamber – and one which takes the time to have the hard conversations and discern a way forward together. In an age of fake news, conspiracy theories, social media and individualism, this is a lesson that deserves wider attention.

Maddy Pennington

Arctic culture and climate

Review of an exhibition at the British museum

The Arctic Circle embraces eight nations (Russia, US, Canada, Greenland (Denmark), Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland), but the homelands of their indigenous peoples predate them all and largely transcend state boundaries. Some 400,000 indigenous peoples with ancestral ties to the Arctic have been trading and communicating with one another for thousands of years. They are comprised of about 40 different ethnological groups with distinct cultural identities but share a way of life now threatened by the retreat of ice. The last 40 years have seen Arctic sea ice reduced by 75 per cent and the north pole will probably be ice-free by 2040. These changes are disrupting Arctic communities and threatening their livelihoods as houses collapse and routes between settlements become impassable. The Arctic is a vital place to focus on if we truly seek to understand how humans can live with climate change in the future, because its people have developed strategies with complex weather systems and changing environments over thousands of years.

This exhibition of the history and culture of the circumpolar peoples is one of the most awe-inspiring I’ve ever seen. I can’t recommend it highly enough to anyone who wishes to learn about sustainable and ethical living. What struck me most was the way thanks are given for everything: it reminded me of my belief that religion arises from a sense of humility and thankfulness, even if you don’t believe in a ‘real’ recipient of that gratitude. It also made me

realise how the colonial supremacist mindset is as destructive as the white one it probably derives from.

To quote from the BM website: 'From ancient mammoth ivory sculpture to modern refitted snow mobiles, the objects in this immersive exhibition reveal the creativity and resourcefulness of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic. Developed in collaboration with Arctic communities, the exhibition celebrates the ingenuity and resilience of Arctic Peoples throughout history. It tells the powerful story of respectful relationships with icy worlds and how Arctic Peoples have harnessed the weather and climate to thrive.

[Climate change is] putting unprecedented pressure on Arctic Peoples, testing their adaptive capacities and threatening their way of life. What happens in the Arctic will affect us all, and this exhibition is a timely reminder of what the world can learn from its people.'

Long ago people knew something was going to happen to this earth. How they knew it, I don't know. An Elder mentioned in the 1940s that this climate was going to change. They mean climate change. – Martha Snowshoe, Teet'it Gwich'in



David Parlett

The Citi exhibition, 22 Oct 2020 - 21 Feb 2021, Room 30, The Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery. Tickets can be ordered online: adults £18, members and under 16s free.

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/arctic-culture-and-climate>

Photo: *Silent Witness*, an inuksuk by Pita Irniq (Inuit), sponsored for this exhibition by the High Commission of Canada in the UK. (See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuksuk>)

Our Meeting House Garden

Last month we laid down two tons of topsoil and one of mulch in the garden between our two buildings. We have begun to buy the plants that will go into the two beds, one by the Adult School Hall wall and the other by the corner of the bed opposite.

Waiting to be planted are three clematis and an Abelia Grandiflora shrub, two peonies with the beautiful names of 'Bowl of Beauty' and 'Nymph', a Cercis tree, and a great many bulbs. Kate is researching roses which are suitable for the space, and we will also have rosemary, lavender and a variety of other plants.

Philip Eley's book *God in the Garden* offers weekly suggestions of work to be done each month, and for November suggests that those of us without a garden grow a bonsai tree. This would be quite a challenge and take a lot of time, but would be a great present or occupation during these difficult times.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22).

GT

Yearly Meeting registration open from 29 Oct 2020

News item by Rebecca Hardy from The Friend dated 30 October 2020

Up to one thousand Friends are expected to gather online next month for Quakers' first online Yearly Meeting Gathering.

The event on 15 November was originally planned for August but had to be postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions. 'Not since 1668 has anything – not even world wars – prevented Yearly Meeting. The Covid-19 pandemic has led Quakers to be a virtual worshipping community. At Yearly Meeting Quakers gather in stillness to listen to stories of experience and to the promptings of love and truth. This time, in a scaled down event from 2.00pm till 4.30pm, they will worship, receive reports and manage required business. Regrettably, there is no programme for children and young people on the day. 'They met in August,' a statement from Britain Yearly Meeting said.

Training for Zoom is available. BYM said that registration for YM is essential, from **Friday 30 October until midnight 10 November**. Instructions are on the Quakers in Britain website at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/>.

Quaker Quest

Quaker Quest Euston has been running for nearly twenty years and before lockdown met at Friends House. It has provided a friendly space for people to find out more about Quakers and to ask a group of Quakers about their experience in the context of the Religious Society of Friends. The Quaker Quest team is just a group of Quakers happy to share their experience of life as Quakers with anyone who is interested.

In April this year, we took the decision to meet online and adopt a looser discussion format that seemed more suitable to sessions using Zoom. Because we are online we can welcome people from any part of Britain or indeed from other parts of the world.

Sessions are friendly and welcoming. They take place every Monday night between 7 and 8.30 and usually follow this format, which is deliberately very interactive:

One of the Quaker Quest team introduces a subject. Recent and forthcoming topics include: silence, forgiveness, community, work, God, and worship. We also tend to look at the testimonies. This is followed by a discussion lasting about 45 minutes in which Quakers and questors alike are invited and encouraged to share their views. The Quakers on the team often find themselves challenged and enlightened by the contribution of questors. After a five-minute break we have a 15-minute Meeting for Worship followed by informal chat which also offers a further opportunity to ask questions or share views.

The best way for people to join the sessions is through the MeetUp group. Signing up for a session provides the Zoom link and also gives the team some idea of how many Questors might be attending. It would be great if the MeetUp link could be shared on any social media you use. This is the link:

<https://www.meetup.com/en-AU/Quaker-Quest-London/>

The email address ZoomQuakerQuest@gmail.com also gives an automatic response with details of the link and password – and queries can be sent to the Gmail account.

Kathy Bell (for Zoom Quaker Quest)

Events (virtual)

Sunday 8 November: Local business meeting

Sunday 15 November: Yearly Meeting

Sunday 22 November: Area meeting

Sunday 29 November: Fifth-Sunday discussion:
how can we make area meetings lively and vibrant? Led by elders

Collections in November

1 Croydon Nightwatch, **8** Quaker Work at Home and Abroad, **15** South London Area Meeting,
22 Homeless Floating Shelter, **29** Open Mind Matters

The deadline for the December/January edition is Sunday 9 November
Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner *Te/07805087981 email* gillianturner033@gmail.com

Mushrooms

Overnight, very
Whitely, discreetly,
Very quietly
Our toes, our noses
Take hold on the loam,
Acquire the air.
Nobody sees us,
Stops us, betrays us;
The small grains make
room.
Soft fists insist on
Heaving the needles,
The leafy bedding,
Even the paving.
Our hammers, our
rams,
Earless and eyeless,
Perfectly voiceless,
Widen the crannies,



Shoulder through
holes. We
Diet on water,
On crumbs of shadow,
Bland-mannered,
asking
Little or nothing.
So many of us!
So many of us!
We are shelves, we are
Tables, we are meek,
We are edible,
Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves.
Our kind multiplies:
We shall by morning
Inherit the earth.
Our foot's in the door.

Sylvia Plath