

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

September 2021

Dear Friends - Autumn term is with us and we look forward to the rich variety of the colours of leaves and berries in the many woods surrounding Croydon. The busy round of discussions, meetings, conferences on Zoom and so on get into motion, and we look forward to meeting each other once again.

Gillian Turner, David Parlett

From Quaker Faith & Practice

'For a Quaker, religion is not an external activity, concerning a special 'holy' part of the self. It is an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self' (Harvey Gillman, 20.20)

Open to the world

How do we remain open to the world with our whole self? It is so easy to shut down...

I know that when I am faced with a new situation I often block the experience by pre-judging what is going to happen. When speaking to someone who perhaps I find difficult, it is easy to start judging them even if trying to remain open. What I am learning is to breathe deeply and imagine opening the heart to embrace the person in front of me and this has helped with accepting them, and sometimes disagreeing but doing so with love.

Being open to the world includes accepting the messiness of life. Things often seem chaotic and it is hard to make sense of what is happening in the world and even in our daily lives. However, when I feel that things are getting too overwhelming and stressful, I come back to the image of a lotus flower. The lotus flower is often seen as a Buddhist symbol and it is used to show that beautiful things can come from messy circumstances. The lotus flower grows in muddy water. I love a quotation I saw recently on an Instagram site (author unknown):

'May I live like the lotus,
At ease in muddy water'

Pam Sellman



None of our readers has managed to grow a lotus flower in the muddy water in their garden, but Cathy grew a sunflower of great size, and Eka's courgette plant produced the magnificent marrow exhibited here by Jade



Photo by Eka

Pleasant things



Canal photo by Margie

Two very pleasant things happened to me at the end of September...

First of all, my catch-up visit with a special Friend. I met Mary at the start of our nurse's training in 1962. We chose Reading as our venue as neither of us knew the town. We stayed in an apartment overlooking the Kennet canal. We had the luxury of a balcony where we could sit, sipping our teas and cake while watching the canal boats using the lock. We realised it was quite an art to push the bar and then the steering bit. Some users were very accomplished while others were obviously very new to the manoeuvres.

Next morning we walked along the canal bank towards the river, admiring the beautiful autumnal colour, the trees so majestic, the water very serene with ducks and swans swimming about.

We also managed to visit the abbey ruins, a reason surely for being in Reading. It was so interesting, and so lovely also to have a guide show us round the Minster. We only went shopping once, and came home feeling so much better.

The following Sunday I came back to Meeting for Worship after such a long time, and thank you Friend for the lift, despite the petrol scare.

It felt very good to be back in the meeting house and to remember how much support and best wishes I received after the accident to my leg I have received. Thank you to all.

And now it is Happy October time.

Margie Ashley

Man's Extremity is God's Opportunity

We are living in politically, socially, economically and environmentally notable and extraordinary times which some philosophers have termed 'the hinge of history'. None can exist in a vacuum as what's going on in the world externally affects each one of us in different ways. The political is the personal. American Jungian psychologist James Hollis suggests that in profoundly changing times where 'the old maps don't apply any more' each individual needs to find 'an internal compass and points of guidance' with which to find continuity and navigate the world.

In *Quaker Faith & Practice* there is much to read about the power of belonging to a Quaker meeting in terms of the offering and receiving of a certain kind of 'love, support, challenge, practical help and a sense of belonging' (Qfp: 10.03) which might help one to develop the sort of internal compass of which Hollis speaks. Shared experience of waiting for spiritual guidance in meetings for worship and 'careful listening and gentleness of heart' forms the bedrock upon which we can 'live out a life of love with and for each other and for those outside our community'.

Alan Watts, born in Chislehurst in 1915, was a writer, philosopher and speaker known for popularising Buddhism and Taoism for a Western audience. In his short film *Conversations with Myself* (1971) he tackles some of the big questions of life and speaks of the shocking news for our human pride that when we come to a critical situation or a dead end and try immediately to untangle things, interfere and intrude we just end up making more of a mess, 'trying to straighten

out a wiggly world'. This is the point where it has been said by John Flavel, a seventeenth century Puritan minister, that 'man's extremity is God's opportunity' and by songwriter Leonard Cohen, 'there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in'. Firstly, Watts suggests, we should take the opportunity to stop, watch and look at everything around us with which we connect. Then all we see is what goes on that is happening of itself: breathing, the wind blowing, the trees waving, blood circulating and nerves tingling. This, Watts feels, is finding connection with our true selves, 'the you that goes on of itself'. Before we think of doing anything in a crisis we must connect with ourselves deeply and look out and realise that the outside world of which we are a part must 'no longer be left outside', as we are part of the whole and the sense of being separate and apart is illusory.

(Watts was a most charismatic speaker of the highest order with a beautifully resonant, actorly, but not excessively dramatic voice and his messages were spiritual and esoteric. There are many of his talks on YouTube which I commend to Friends as I feel that the paragraph above does not go very far in communicating his meaning.)

Having said that, I'll leave the last word to the late, great author, poet, dancer, memoirist, journalist and essayist, Maya Angelou: 'Have enough courage to trust love one more time and always one more time'.

Barbara Earl

Living Between Worlds – Finding Personal Resilience in Changing Times, James Hollis
The Wisdom of Insecurity, Alan W. Watts

A Weekend Retreat at Woodbrooke

This Woodbrooke retreat of 24-26 September was offered as an experiment to see whether it would attract sufficient takers to make it financially viable, as indeed it did. Fifty Friends from a wide variety of ages and parts of the country welcomed the opportunity, the first since March 2020, to be in this much-loved venue on a balmy late summer weekend.

The programme was carefully chosen, with meetings for worship and epilogue beginning and ending each day, and six events spread out over the three days. Individual writing time, quiet time, creative time, yoga and meditation were each allotted space in a variety of rooms for Friends to make use of as they wished. The garden room with its tea and coffee machine was always available, and as always each day was punctuated with meal times and coffee breaks. There was no obligation to join in anything, and rest and recuperation was the order of the day.

Two outdoor events gave us the opportunity to spend time together in the garden. We had two talks - one, by Duncan Cadbury a Trustee of the Bourneville Village Trust, focused on George Cadbury and his vision for the future of his factory and the housing of his employees; the other session was based on Rhiannon Grant's latest publication *Hearing the Light*.

On Saturday afternoon many of us walked through the garden to make our way to Bourneville Village, noting as we went the many buildings mentioned by Duncan in his talk, especially the alms-houses and the meeting house, where I took a photo of the TreeCosy.

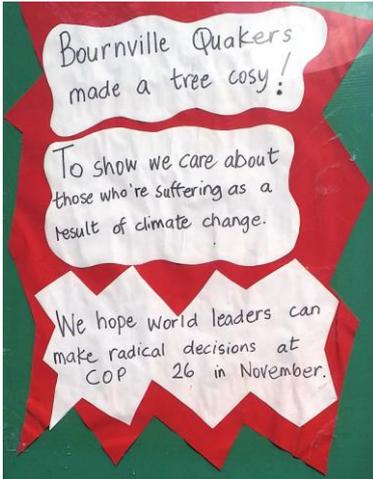
That evening I sat through a 1922 black and white silent film called *Beauty's Worth*, about a Quaker girl led astray by fashion, dancing, and handsome young men. There were some laughs, but not very many.

Before lunch on Sunday we had our plenary, when we discussed with Sandra Berry, the Director, Trustees' future plans for learning, and how the estate might be used in the future. Sandra told us how the pandemic affected the use of the building, with all the problems that local meetings have had, but writ large. Risk assessments, social distancing, staff furloughed or resigned, rising costs, serious lack of income as in-person events ended or were restricted, anxiety about the future. Like so many of our local meetings, Trustees looked for new ways to raise money. We heard how they were approached by local groups seeking accommodation for National Health staff, a Book Day in the garden for primary children, staff meetings with enough room for social distancing, and so on. At the same time online learning continued and the Woodbrooke Meeting for Worship on Sunday mornings attracted an international audience.

Sandra and the trustees hope that in-person conferences can continue, but they must be financially viable. They are trialling a new version of their Woodbrooke-on-the-road events for Local and



Area Meetings. They hope to repeat their Retreat Weekend, but that depends on the number of Friends who apply. I will be first in line.



Not on the agenda was the most important part of the weekend for me – the opportunity to meet Friends from a wide variety of meetings. Our conversations all started from the same place: we cannot go back to where we were, because it is no longer there. The structure is still in place: clerks, elders, treasurers, trustees. Meeting houses are still there. Although we can meet in person now, we can choose to go online to worship together, find spiritual nourishment, meet people with similar and different interests, and not attach ourselves to a meeting where we live at all. We discussed in our small informal groups how we must embrace Zoom in our meetings yet keep our identity within our local community.

It was a valuable weekend for me, and has given me a great deal to think about and to share.

Gillian Turner

Unarmed protest

Despite Covid-19, one of the world's largest arm fairs, Defence Security and Equipment (DSEi) was held in London's Docklands in September. This biennial fair displays planes, bombs, rockets, guns, tanks and warships and brings together sales people from over 800 international arms manufacturers with delegations from major arms importing countries, invited by the British Government. Many of these delegations come from countries engaged in conflict or that abuse the human rights of their own people, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Peace protestors were there too.

For many years a silent, candle-lit vigil has been held on the eve of the London arms fair. This was originally organised by local churches and people, outraged that this event was being held in the neighbourhood where some of them had lost relatives in the blitz of London's docklands. It has been the one event during the week when protestors have been allowed inside the security perimeter around the ExCel centre that cocoons the arms dealers from seeing any protestors for the rest of the week. We have formed a large circle, in a field in front of the building, for an act of worship and witness for people of all faiths and none.

This year, when I arrived on 13 September for the vigil organised by Pax Christi, Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Quaker Roots, I was pleased to see more participants than ever and greet some Quaker and other old friends. We had to file through the gate in the security fence, but then we found that the gate was closed, leaving about half of us outside. A rumour went round that they were asking people whether they were Quakers. Whether that would have been in my favour I never found out, as I did not even get to the gate! So about a hundred of us had a small experience of being excluded, without understanding why.

Gradually and quietly, those inside moved to form a semi-circle at the perimeter fence and we



Photo: Independent Catholic News

moved into a semi-circle outside. The circle was reformed and the vigil held, with the fence down the middle a powerful symbol of the attempts of those in power to divide us. As the darkness gathered, we focused on trying to keep our candles alight in the breeze beside the dock, helping each other to re-light them as they faltered.

Protests in various forms by Quakers and many others continued throughout the week, particularly on the first day of the arms fair, 14 September, although unfortunately I didn't manage to get to any of them.

Rhiannon Rees

September Area Meeting

*Held online 19 September 2021 at Croydon Virtual Meeting House
Attended by 12 Friends representing Croydon, Epsom, Purley, Streatham & Brixton and Sutton Meetings, plus clerk and assistant clerks from Croydon.*

During our opening period of worship we heard part of Paragraph 3.10 of *Quaker Faith & Practice*: 'Value the meeting as a social occasion. Introduce strangers to one another. Be approachable; be cheerful. If you are an experienced Friend, invite newcomers to come with you. Help them to understand the business and to get to know the membership.'

We heard minutes of record for the life of Wilfrid Hayler, Les Oldmeadow and Ronald Pearse and agreed to forward a testimony for Wilfrid Hayler to the Recording Clerk's Office for possible publication in next year's Epistles and Testimonies.

We discussed the Simpler Meetings document sent by Quaker Life. We recognised there was scope to share across the Area Meeting both social and spiritual activities and would take the discussion to our local meetings to consider what is important and essential to us as a Quaker community. We cannot do everything and must be prepared to let go of inessentials. We also asked our Elders and Overseers to consider sharing the programme of local activities within SLAQM and to feed back to the November AM.

Minutes on assisted dying were received from Croydon and Sutton Meetings and circulated before the meeting.

We received a report from Josh Edgson of Croydon Meeting about attending Senior Conference. (This was published in our September newsletter.)

The collated accounts and Trustees' Report have been approved by our Trustees and will be submitted for examination by Independent Examiners Myrus Smith. They have been signed at this meeting on behalf of the Trustees and will be submitted to the Quaker Stewardship Committee.

The next Area Meeting will be on Sunday 21st November 2021 and will be hosted by Purley Meeting.

Pam Sellman and Liz Collins (Clerk and Assistant Clerk this time)

Coming up

Sunday 10 October: Croydon Friends meeting for worship for business, via Croydon's Zoom meeting, at 1pm. Items include a discussion document about ways in which we can make our local meetings simpler to manage by reducing roles or sharing them within the Area meeting, and the day and time at which business meeting takes place to make it easier for people to attend. Please read the Simpler Meetings document in advance of the meeting. It is appended to the agenda, which has been circulated. If you can't attend the meeting but would like to comment please notify the clerks by email before 12:00pm on Sunday so that we can share your contribution.

Sunday 17 October: SLAQM area meeting via Croydon's Zoom meeting, at 1.30 pm.

Sunday 24 October: Fourth-Sunday discussion 1pm on Zoom: Themes from the Swarthmore Lecture, at, led by Maddy Pennington.

Collecting in October

03 South London Area Meeting, **10** Friends House Moscow **17** Croydon Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Support Group, **24** Praxis Community Projects, **31** Young Friends General Meeting, **Nov 7** Britain Yearly Meeting

Anagroans

Find six five-letter words, all being rearrangements of the same five letters.

When put in alphabetical order, they may be clued as follows:

- (1) element, (2) inarticulate vocalisation, (3) half an ape, (4) underground station,
- (5) keyboard instrument, (6) half an Indian dish. – **DP**

The deadline for the November edition is 26 October 2021
 Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner
 Tel 07805087981 email gillianturner033@gmail.com

Into the Woods 29: Beneath the trees



Photo: Katherine Locke

Let the roots be consulted
 before you take any action
 every time you breath in
 thank a tree.

let tree roots crack parking lots
 at the world's bank headquarters.
 let loggers be druids
 especially trained and rewarded
 to sacrifice trees at auspicious times
 let carpenters be master artisans

let lumber be treasured like gold
 let chainsaws be played like saxophones.
 let soldiers on manoeuvres plant trees
 give police and criminals a thousand
 seedlings
 let businessmen carry pockets of acorns
 let newlyweds honeymoon in the woods
 walk don't drive
 stop writing poetry
 squat under a tree
 and tell stories

John Wright (selected by Katherine Locke).