

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

September 2017

Dear Friends - After the summer break, September seems busier than ever, yet our newsletter reflects the fun and enjoyment we had at various Quaker events during July and August. We must make sure that all that enthusiasm and optimism comes along with the busyness into the rest of the year. We have our Area Meeting on 17 September, held once a year at Croydon, and Quaker Week begins on 30 September, along with many other activities. **Gillian Turner**

The silence of a Quaker meeting for worship can be an experience of unity. I am an orthodox, garden variety Christian; I find an image of God first in Jesus Christ. But it is my joy in the silent meeting to seek with those who find different ways to express the inexpressible truths of religious experience. Words can divide us, but the silence can bring us together. Whatever kinds of community the world needs, it surely needs the kind that embraces human diversity. - **Parker J Palmer 1977**

If you want to see the heroic, look at those who can love in return for hatred.
If you want to see the brave, look for those who can forgive. **Bhagavad Gita**

News of Friends

New school year: Joshus and Luca begin their first year at secondary school, while Malachi moves into Year 8. Olivia, Georgina, Jacob and Albie all move up a year. We wish them a happy and exciting school term!

Marjorie Evans is back home after her stay at hospital, and doing very well. She welcomes phone calls and visitors. And she will be 96 this month! All our love and best wishes to her.

Jade Flahive Gilbert has returned to Indonesia for her final year studying gamelon. She came to meeting when she was not working and it was good to see her. We send her love and best wishes for a successful time, living adventurously.

Matt Alton has joined Blair Hunwick and Emily Collins and her partner Gareth Iley as a tenant in our meeting house flat. We hope he will be happy there.

Isabelle and David Rees send greetings from Yearly Meeting Gathering.

Reflections on Yearly Meeting Gathering

1. A happy experience

It was a very busy week, with an amazing choice of events to attend. I went to all the main Sessions and usually two small events each afternoon/evening, as well as a meditative activity each morning. I made copious notes which I still haven't looked at.

My main impression was of a very friendly community. There were always people to chat with, and people smiled when you passed them whether they knew you or not. You could join a table of strangers at breakfast or dinner, and immediately get into conversation. I was not as aware of the younger generations as I have been at some other Gatherings, but it was a delight to see them in the closing Session. I was disappointed that I did not get to meet many of the people with whom I shared a flat – my own fault, I should have organised something! However, it is always good to see familiar faces – people I have met in the past at conferences or on committees, others from South London AM, and people whom I have just seen over the years at Yearly Meeting.

I was lucky to have accommodation near the action, but also not far from a delightful lake-side country walk where I could recover from the busyness.

For the Wednesday outing I chose to go to the National Memorial Arboretum. Among the mostly military memorials there is a Quaker memorial, very simple in the form of a circle of seats like a Meeting for Worship, with words inscribed commemorating the Quaker contribution to peace.

We held a short Meeting for Worship there. We also saw among the many memorials one called 'Shot at Dawn', which consists of a forest of poles, each one marked with the name and age of someone executed for cowardice in the First World War – many aged under 20. That was extremely moving.

I had hoped to find a personal 'calling' through the Gathering, but that did not happen, or at least not directly. I did get the message that large movements are the result of many small contributions, so maybe my occasional participation in a protest demonstration, and my financial contributions to pressure groups, are better than nothing. I also realised that Quakers need to support whatever they discern as furthering the Kingdom of God, even if it hasn't a Quaker label.

Barbara Cairns (Epsom Meeting)

2. Friends and friendliness

There has been extensive reportage of YMG 2017 in *The Friend*. What more is there to say?

Well, in terms of this individual, I went to YMG for the first time to get a bigger, wider picture of Quakerism beyond attendance at a local meeting and going up to Friends House (and elsewhere) for special events. I knew that the Swarthmore Lecture has considerable significance and status – so clearly I had to go to that. As it turned out, I went to all the main events, so to speak, and to the follow-up sessions later on. In particular, Catherine West was even more impressive in the subsequent session held later to meet the Swarthmore lecturer. (Throughout YMG we were asked about what we were going to *do*. The Tory MP for East Surrey is getting a copy of Catherine West's book *Faith in politics? A testimony to equality*. Without a doubt, the man who couldn't be bothered to canvass at the last General Election will be delighted).

I wanted information about Quakerism and certainly got loads of it – and would have got more if some workshops hadn't clashed! But that's always the way, in any conference full of good things. There was a bookshop where I got my Quaker calendar for 2018, lots of leaflets and pamphlets and weather was ideal for walking round the Warwick campus.

What's the problem? Well, there isn't one, except I got considerably more than I expected. I've spent a fair chunk of my life going to conferences, hearing clever, well written papers, picking up on leads that would help me with my own interests and research (and being rather cautious with other people, as academic conferences, in particular, are very competitive). And, in part, that's what I wanted from YMG 2017... even more books about Quakerism to read, ideas about other conferences and YMGs (Limerick next year anyone?) to go to, and even more Quaker societies to join.

So, what's the issue? What I'm finding is that when I go to Quaker events the only thing that is predictable is that I'm going to be surprised by something (though it may take me a couple of days or weeks to work it out). The notes I took confirmed that Quakers are really focused on understanding power, asking pertinent questions: What is it? Who has it? Are responsibility and power the same thing? However, that wasn't the surprise. To digress, on Facebook this morning, somebody has posted a video that makes fun of how Londoners are appalled when a chap from the North of England gets off the train at a London terminal and starts smiling, making eye contact and saying good morning to complete strangers. I think the police were called. I seem to have learnt that lesson too well. (Even these days, when I get off the train at Glasgow Central, there is almost a physical jolt as I realise that it is permissible to talk to people that I've not been introduced to). Well, something strange happened at Warwick. I remember just going into the cafeteria, sitting at tables with people I didn't know and getting into conversations. Yes, talking with strangers... whatever next...? There was one memorable morning when a new friend from Devon and I laughed until we cried. So, I guess my abiding memory of YMG will be how the Quaker experience became emotionally active, experiencing Quakerism - and perhaps understanding it at a new and deeper level - by enjoying the friendliness of Quakers.

Helen Johnson

3. Personal Reflections on Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017

Yearly Meeting (YM) 2017 did not take any major decisions, like the decision on same sex marriage (York, 2009); the commitment to become a low carbon community (Canterbury 2011) or even the concern for housing that emerged from YM 2015 at Friends House. Perhaps we all need to consolidate these decisions - certainly we in Croydon have hardly started to become a low carbon community. Also events in the world, such as the increase in equality world-wide, conflict in the Middle East, mass movements of migrants and refugees and Brexit have meant that Friends

are concerned about so many different issues. It was inspiring and encouraging to hear how many different causes groups of British Friends are working on, either as Quaker groups or with others - and the theme of this year's YMG was 'Working with others to build a Better World'.

In response to comments that previous Yearly Meeting Gatherings had been too busy (about 1,500 Quakers can be overwhelming and there are so many interesting activities going on!) the format had been changed. Routine business was kept to a minimum and dealt with efficiently and there were no Special Interest Groups at lunch-time. I had decided not to plan and to 'go with the flow', so have only myself to blame for the events I missed (but could read on the web-site!) and getting overtired!

The 'keynote' prepared ministry from George Lakey, an American Quaker, was unexpectedly moving. I had heard him speak before about his work as a human rights monitor and activist, but this time he responded to Sunday's theme of 'heart' and spoke about losing his son, and most of us were almost in tears. He also told a story about hearing shouting at night in his downtown neighbourhood, where it appeared a man was threatening his partner. All he could think of doing, as an elderly white man, was to go out and shout 'I'm watching you', which seemed very inappropriate. After this happened several times, an older African American woman approached with great dignity and said to the man 'We don't treat our women like that'. Sometimes, George said, we need to 'turn up' and act as place-holder for someone who can do more about the situation than us. In powerful ministry we heard about bringing our whole selves to our work and making ourselves vulnerable and the importance of 'accompaniment' - being alongside the vulnerable and marginalised.

A highlight for me was Tim Gee's George Gorman lecture, which challenged us to return to being an open movement for justice and peace and consider becoming 'Sanctuary Meetings'. You can watch it at:

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/after-the-gathering-11-ways-to-live-our-quaker-faith>.

In the margins of the main sessions I went to Special Interest Groups on the arms fair, 'Citizens UK' and Conflict within Meetings, became involved in a project to craft white poppies as a protest against the arms fair and, not least, spent time with Croydon Friends past and present, including David and Isabelle Rees.

Rhiannon Rees

4. Thoughts on 'Epistles and Testimonies'

Of all the documents and annual reports published for our Yearly Meetings, the one I look forward to most is Epistles and Testimonies. The word 'Epistle' has a ring of solemnity about it, much more so than 'letter' and takes us back to those early Friends travelling by foot, horseback and boat to share the message of their leadings in faith.

The Epistles in the document come from Europe and the Middle East, southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and parts of the USA where Quakers' worship is based on silent waiting, seeking the divine in stillness. Other Quaker meetings have evolved patterns of programmed worship, with hymns, a sermon, Bible readings and prayers and mostly come from Africa and the USA. The introduction explains how these traditions are affiliated to the Friends World Committee for Consultation and it's all very interesting to those who like to consider a world-wide view of the Society.

The themes of the Epistles from Europe were very similar to our own: how can we, in our small meetings, bring about change in the world? The refugee crisis, climate change, social justice and homelessness all featured, but there were some surprises. Two YMs, Ireland and Sweden, wrote about conflict: *The Gift of Conflict*, which 'offers the potential for compassion, creativity and innovation', and Sweden YM heard about 'learning to quarrel so that we meet in the conflict and become more human.' Swedish Quakers are included in the Ecumenical Programme's steering committee in Israel and Palestine.

The Epistle from Ramallah Friends Meeting speaks strongly of the hardships the Meeting, and the Palestinian community, have endured. 'Systems of violence press down on us and physically separate our meeting members. The pressures are enormous; the weight we carry is bewildering ... Yet we know the Truth... the sure knowledge that God continues to accompany us - even in our deepest moments of despair.' The Epistle ends with a reference to 'our ongoing dialogue with international groups who are eager to learn from the witness we bear to an oppressive occupation through the daily living of a theology of non-violence.'

All the Epistles spoke of the pleasure of spending time together in worship and fellowship, in Norway and Sweden ‘meeting among the wood anemones and trees bursting into leaf; setting off on our outing in two comfortable boats winding their way between islands and skerries.’ The welcome presence of children and young people, and of visitors from other countries added to the enjoyment.

I particularly enjoyed the description of the climax of the Tanzania conference: honouring three of their Women of Substance. ‘We had them lead a procession as others sang and danced, had their histories read, and gave each a certificate of thanks and presented them each with a solar lamp, since they had been beacons of light to us.’ How I would love to see that idea taken up at our Yearly Meetings! [*To be continued*]

Gillian Turner

5. Personal reflections

Woodbrooke Learning - The Woodbrooke tent was conveniently situated next to the ice-cream van and opposite Costa, silently reminding everyone who entered of the sustenance available to body and spirit when we book into a course at Woodbrooke Study Centre. There were course tutors waiting to talk about courses, and the splendid guide covering a multitude of courses, something for everyone, from ‘The Art of grounding oneself’ to ‘Young Adult Friends Retreat’. (Copies available in the meeting house. And online).

Woodbrooke also provides online courses for the busy Friend, such a rich variety: about peace, sustainability, an introduction to the Quaker way, A Quaker response to animal suffering, and so on. How to write a brilliant Annual Report - rather than the mundane one I usually manage – seems a possibility, but I’ve settled for the one on Paradise Lost, since even the cursory glance I gave it when it turned up on my reading list at university has vanished from my memory.

Meeting Friends old and new - This is always a central part on any Quaker gathering. It’s always good to see again those with Croydon connections, Anna Benedikz and Georgina, Kitty McVey, Clair Tighe and Matt Alton helping with the Junior Yearly Meeting programme, Joshua and Olivia Edgson part of the Children’s programme; David and Isabelle Rees, Gemma Tighe, Jean Campbell Leith, Jennifer and Jonathan Hodgkin. And as I’ve been on lots of committees over the years it was great to see old friends and catch up with their news, some very sad. There were lots of hugs at YMG at Warwick in 2017.

Gillian Turner

New books in the library

We have recently acquired a number of new books for the library based on Friends’ recommendations and the recommendation of the Quaker Book Shop. They are (with some quotations about them):

Not in God’s Name (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks) - “Jonathan Sacks explores the roots of violence and its relationship to religion, focusing on the historic tensions between the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.”

Living our Beliefs – an exploration of the faith and practice of Quakers - developed and edited by young Quakers with Graham Ralph.

Celebration of Discipline – the path to spiritual growth (Richard Foster) - “This book explores the classic disciplines of the Christian faith: the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting and study; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission and service; and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance and celebration.”

Until we are free – my fight for human rights in Iran (Shirin Ebadi) - “The first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, Shirin Ebadi has inspired millions with her work as a human rights lawyer in Iran, defending women and children. Now she reveals how she and her family were subjected to years of intimidation and violence by the Iranian authorities.”

Hanging by a Thread (Samuel Wells, vicar of St Martin in the Fields) - “Samuel Wells considers the risk, cost and suffering of the cross in the light of six key contemporary concerns: the reliability of history, the fragility of trust, the fact of mortality, the search for meaning, the nature of power, and the character of love.”

Discernment and Inner Knowing – making decisions for the best (Joycelin Dawes) - “Joycelin Dawes explores the Quaker tradition and practice of discernment alongside modern secular leadership approaches of presencing and sensing...offers an invaluable synthesis...”

Other titles, which include some re-issued classics, are:

The Art of Meditation and Practising the Presence by Joel S. Goldsmith;

A Little Book of Unknowing by Jennifer Kavanagh;

Encounter with Silence – reflections from the Quaker tradition by John Punshon;

God just is – approaches to silent worship by Curt Gardner;

God and decision making – a Quaker approach by Jane Mace;

Listening to the Light – how to bring Quaker simplicity and integrity into our lives by Jim

Pym.

Kay Papadopoulos (Librarian)

The Arms Fair

As many of you probably know by now, one of the world’s largest arms fairs will be taking place at the ExCel Centre in London’s docklands from 12-15 September. This is an international arms fair with delegations from all over the world, including many from the UK Foreign Office’s own list of countries that cause concern on human right grounds (ie. in many cases countries that are in conflict, with their neighbours or internally, and repressive regimes that use weapons against their own people). The delegations come to promote sales and purchases of weapons and so-called ‘security’ equipment.

This time the protests will begin the week before the arms fair begins and a wide variety of organisations and groups will be organising actions between 4 and 11 September under the ‘Stop the Arms Fair’ umbrella. These include a ‘No Faith in War’ day on Tuesday 5 September, organised by a number of different faith communities, and a ‘Day of Action’ involving all the different groups on Saturday 9 September. There will be a Quaker Meeting for Worship near the ExCel at 11am on Tuesday 5 September and another on the afternoon of Saturday 9 September.

There will also be an art exhibition of work relating to the arms trade in the vicinity of the ExCel from 12 to 15 September while the arms fair is taking place. If you or anyone you know would like to support the protests but are unable to get there because of not being able to stand for long or just not liking demos, you can show your support by sending art work to ‘Art the Arms Fair’ (ATAF).

I also enclose an invitation to participate in a craft project to make white poppies to show support for the protests. The photo shows some that were made by Quakers at Yearly Meeting Gathering, but of course everyone is invited to join in. I hope to go to the ‘No Faith in War’ day on Tuesday 5 September and could take any poppies that you or your friends make, if you like. I could also take art work for ‘Art the Arms Fair’, provided it is easy to carry. A holiday project (particularly if it’s wet!)? If you would like any more information about any of this do let me know,

You might be interested in these arts events related to ‘Art the Arms Fair’, an art exhibition which will take place in the vicinity of the ExCel Centre during the DSEI arms fair.

This is a way for anyone who cannot get to the ExCel to show their support for the protests against the arms fair, as people are invited to take or send any art works related to the arms trade for the exhibition, to be sold afterwards in support of CAAT funds.

I have also become involved in a folk art project to make white poppies, either crochet, knotted or sewn from pieces of felt, lace etc as a contribution to ‘Art the Arms Fair’. If you or friends make any in time for the ‘No Faith in War’ day on Tuesday 5 September I could take them then. The idea is to make them into an installation or into poppies that can be worn and contribute them to ‘Art the Arms Fair’ to be sold in aid of CAAT.

This white poppy project started at the Quaker Yearly Meeting Gathering, but of course anyone is welcome to contribute. A few Quakers were concerned that this should not prevent people from contributing to the white poppies that are provided by the Peace Pledge Union, as this is an important source of funds for them. I hope that people will still take and wear the white paper poppies from the PPU and donate for them (I think Grace has some from last year?). Also we have told the PPU about the craft project and they think it’s a great idea. I see on Facebook that the PPU and Forces Watch are starting a new project with schools on peace education, promoting the white poppies and an alternative version of remembrance to the Government’s agenda of justifying and even glorifying war. In peace,

Rhiannon Rees

Woodbrooke-on-the-Road

Streatham & Brixton meeting are hosting a Woodbrooke-on-the-Road event on October 8th on the topic of 'Experiences of the Spirit'. This will be made open to all the local meetings in our Area. Most of the places have been taken up by Friends from Streatham & Brixton meeting but there are still about 10 left. If you would like to attend please notify Sarah via sarah.totterdell@gmail.com. And, just as importantly, please could you also let her know if you then prove unable to attend, as there will be a substitutes list if it is over-subscribed. **Frances Touch**

Quaker Week

Quaker Week runs from 30 September to 7 October and is a major national event. There are many interesting events at Friends House and Westminster meeting, and Streatham and Brixton LM are running a Woodbrooke on the road day on 7 October (details below.)

In Croydon we are concentrating on two areas: using the various social media to advertise who and where we are, and Dressing our Meeting House, that is, to use our buildings to show to visitors and hirers who we are.

To do this we have ordered posters, including a special one for this week in 2017, and will change all the posters, outside and in, before the start of the week. We plan to have a display of free books and leaflets in the vestibule and encourage people to help themselves, and to display in the Common Room Quaker books on loan. Friends House are sending postcards designed for us to send to a friend advertising Quaker Week.

We are hoping also to have drop-in sessions for tea and conversation, but this still in the planning stage. **Outreach committee**

Games Day

As part of our contribution to Quaker Week we will be holding a **games day** at Croydon meeting house on Saturday 7 October from 10.30am to 5.00pm, with snacks and refreshments available throughout the day and a simple lunch provided at 1pm. Bring your own board games or card games, or take advantage of some already provided by Croydon Friends. Games inventor and historian David Parlett will mount a small exhibition of some games of ethnic and historical interest and at about 2pm will offer an illustrated talk, including some thoughts on where and how games began and some things you almost certainly didn't know about Monopoly.

News about our buildings

The Adult School Hall has been used continuously during July and August by the National Community Challenge charity for the Challenge sessions. It has been good to see the hall and the new garden behind the meeting house used by such a wide range of young people, enjoying themselves and responding to challenges of various kinds.

I was asked to offer a challenge to a dozen young people, and decided to ask them to make the **garden** hidden behind the meeting house attractive to children, especially the small children who come to Kumon for extra lessons in English and Maths.

They came up with a variety of innovative suggestions which I hope we can do, but the one at the top of their list is replant the three large pots at the front with a more interesting selection of flowers and edibles. Now there's a challenge!

In the meeting house we have had the gents' toilet redecorated to bring it into line with the ladies across the way. That one is twinned to a block in Africa. Is there a man among us who would undertake to raise enough money to twin the Gents'?

Diary dates

Tuesday 5 September: Arms Fair art protest See Rhiannon's article above.

Sunday 10 September: Croydon meeting for worship for business 12.15 in the main meeting room. All welcome!

Tuesday 12 September, 18:30 to 21:00 at Friends House, Euston: **Open Bethlehem** film screening and Q&A with its director Leila Sansour. This event is being supported by Quakers in Britain and is an opportunity to see the film, meet new friends, become an 'Open Bethlehem Ambassador', and get involved. The screening will be followed by a reception with light

refreshments with an audience Q&A. Leila will be in conversation with moderator Yossi Mekelberg, a Professor of International Relations and fellow at Chatham House.

Sunday 17 September: South London Area meeting at Croydon meeting house from 1:30pm after a light lunch (provided by Croydon Friends in the Adult School Hall). We start with an all-age worship session in which we will be looking at 'Meeting for eating' passages in Luke's gospel. This will be followed at about 2:30 with business matters, including two reports on visits to applicants and perhaps also the collated AM accounts for 2016. All welcome, but attenders are asked to notify Margaret Skelton if they wish to attend.

Thursday 28 September: People and Planet At Sutton meeting house from 7.30 pm. Follow-up to Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017.

Wednesday 18 October, 7.15pm for a prompt 7.30pm start, House of Commons, Portcullis House, in the Boothroyd Room. **Meet Mark and Caroline!** Conscience invites you for an evening with Sir Mark Rylance (international star of stage and screen) and Caroline Lucas (co-leader of the Green Party and the former Vice Chair of the Stop The War Campaign) for a discussion on "What Does an Ethical Foreign Policy Look Like?" Capacity is very limited and this will be a sell-out, so reserve your free place now at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/mark-rylance-in-conversation-with-caroline-lucas-tickets-36860767548>

Sat 30 Sept - Sun 8 Oct: QUAKER WEEK!

Sunday 1 October: Business meeting Croydon mh from 12:15. (Date to be confirmed.)

Saturday 7 October: Games Day See item above.

Sunday 8 October: Woodbrooke Study Day at Streatham & Brixton Meeting – see item above.

Collected in July and August

July 2 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad **60.50** (YM **115**), **9** South London Area Meeting **26** (AM **72**), **16** Woodbrooke **80**, **23** Croydon Local Meeting **84** (PM **214**), **30** Support and Help in Education (SHINE) **35**. **August 6** Quaker Work at Home and Abroad **86**, **13** Croydon Refugee Centre **85**, **20** South London Area Meeting **43**, **27** Mind in Croydon **83**.

Collecting in September: 3 South East Cancer Help Centre, **10** Croydon Local Meeting, **17** Friends World Committee for Consultation, **24** Worldwide Alternatives to Violence (WAVE).

The deadline for the October edition is Sunday 30 September 2017

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

HAPPY BIRTHDAYS!

JOSHUA EDGSON 12 on 4th, ALBIE FRENCH 9 on 25th, JACOB FRENCH 9 on 25th.



Guess who visited the butterfly tent at the Natural History Museum...