

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

September 2018

'Back to school!' Unless you've been living on Mars for the last few weeks you will have been greeted at every shopping opportunity with this expression of relief and triumph on the part of everyone who doesn't have to drive to work. As former teachers, your editors both still regard September as the first month of the year and the 1st thereof as New Year's Day. But it has the salutary effect of drawing our attention to the recognition that it's our young people who will soon be taking care of the world (if not Mars). As Helen Johnson notes later in this issue, 'The young people must take over for life to go on'. And, as you will see from the first few pages of this edition, those of Croydon meeting are making a firm start. **Gillian Turner and David Parlett**

When language is used unthinkingly, without being related to the experience of either the speaker or the listener, it is meaningless. Words are only symbols and when there is no shared experience the symbolism breaks down. When we speak of our own experience, our feelings are always involved. The same is true when we listen to others: we may read into their words meanings which are not intended but which reflect our own emotions. Certain words or kinds of language may arouse such strong emotions that we are only able to relate them to our own experience and not to that of the speaker. Speakers too may be unaware of the effect of their words. The more important and profound the subject matter, the greater the need for sensitivity in choosing our words. This is no excuse for playing safe in what we say, or for not listening to others when what they say makes us uncomfortable.

Conference: Exploring the fundamental elements of Quakerism, 1986 (Qfp 2.63)

News of Friends

Best wishes to our younger Friends, **Malaki, Joshua, Luka, Olivia, Albie, Jacob** and **Olivia**, beginning their new school year in September, especially Olivia who has moved on to secondary level.

Jade Flahive Gilbert has returned from her three-year musical studies in Indonesia. She is soon to begin her music career here as a music specialist in a nursery in Kingston. Teaching music to four –year-olds and under will be a new and exciting venture for Jade, as her teaching experience has mostly been with special needs teenagers and adults.

Matt Alton started a new job as a teaching assistant in a primary school in Sussex in June. He commuted for the last half term of the academic year and has now moved to live with friends in Brighton, which is a 15-minute train journey from his school. He will be mainly working with Year 3 and 4, and will have a focus on pastoral care one to ones. He wishes to thank everyone at Croydon Meeting for their friendship and support.

Clair Tighe was a child of the meeting at about the same time as Matt and Alasdair Spence. Those who remember her and Gemma will be interested to know that she was married on 17 August to Ishan Siddiqui at Ealing Town Hall.

Chris Alton has moved into the flat in place of Matt. We welcome him and hope he is happy there. Chris is an artist, whose projects include: an anti-fascist, pro-disco protest movement; a rhythm 'n' blues album about tax avoidance; and a neoclassical treehouse. He also enjoys reading, cooking, skateboarding and cycling. Chris regularly volunteers at young Quaker events. To find out more about his work visit: www.chrisalton.com

Marjorie Evans is staying for a short while at Hayes Court Nursing Home, 50 Hayes Lane, Kenley CR8 5LA, tel: 020 8660 3432. For anyone who is able to visit, visiting times are 3-8pm. Tea/supper is at 5pm, but they don't mind people visiting then. Hayes Lane is quite a steep country lane without pavements and Hayes Court is near the top.

Godfrey Turner sends his love to everyone at Croydon Meeting. He is no longer able to be with you on Sundays but is always pleased to see visitors.

Young Adults and the Future of Quakerism

I spent six weeks at Woodbrooke over the summer, having been awarded the Eva Koch scholarship. The scholarship is awarded to 4 Friends every year to enable them to conduct research which will be beneficial to the life and self understanding of Friends. Being awarded the scholarship was an absolute privilege; I was able to commit time to thought and research, and I have made friends for life. My chosen topic was 'Young Adults and the Future of Quakerism'.

I ran six discussion sessions with 60 young adult Friends, asking them what they want Quakerism to look like in the future and what can be done to enable them to be change makers. If you watch *The Friend*, I will have an article there soon. I will be submitting one to *Friends Quarterly*, and I will be producing guidance for Local Meetings on how to welcome, include and enable young adults to be change makers, along with similar guidance for young adults themselves.

I have found it useful to use *Our Faith in the Future* as a framework to present my results. While I believe it was a truly discerned statement, I know that the process was not age representative - a key reason to do this research. The vision the people I spoke to have come up with does not depart from *Our Faith in the Future*, but it qualifies and makes it more specific. In my *Friends Quarterly* article I will use this framework. As a preview on the main question - 'what should Quakerism look like in the future?' - key themes of the vision are: more education for newcomers and old hands; sharing from the heart, not the head; being able to disagree and face up to issues; a membership structure which is not necessarily geographically based; getting rid of unnecessary roles and letting the spirit lead us to take action which isn't necessarily perfect; going out into the world and being bold that we do have an answer.

At some point soon the video of a 20-minute spoken presentation of my work will be available online, and I will make sure Croydon Meeting knows when it is. As I have said, I will be disseminating my work in numerous ways, and the ideas will continue to grow.

Matt Alton

Young Friends Summer Gathering

The younger Edgsons attended YFSG at Leighton Park this year. Livy reports first:

When we arrived we were welcomed and immediately we played games to settle us to the spirit of the summer gathering. Generally, our days involved meeting for worship in the mornings, base groups for discussion and games. We had spare times in the afternoon to do our own things which was nice and relaxing, before dinner. Often we didn't go to bed before 11pm each evening!

What I liked about it. I liked the idea about making a pouch for your secret friend and getting nice presents and goodies. The adults were there for us if we needed help and I enjoyed them trying to make us laugh. My favourite thing was making new friends and sharing a room with funny and kind girls. Their names were Anita, Sophie and Polly (Leo). Throughout the week I made 11 friends.

What I didn't like about it. I didn't like the meeting for worship because it was boring just sitting still for one hour. Secondly, the epilogue sessions were quite annoying because we had to sit or lie down on the hard floor. My opinion is that next year we have epilogue outside perhaps, on the grass!

What I found fun My favourite part of last week is when we went to Oxford because we were in groups of 3-5 and we could spend our money in shops on anything we wanted to buy without our parents saying no!

I enjoyed the activities particularly going swimming each day, the 'Christmas' disco and the barn dance.

Thank you for letting me go along. I met some really lovely people and I look forward to going back next year!!

Olivia Edgson

And as for Josh...

I really enjoyed going back to Leighton Park again this year as I caught up with a lot of old friends from the Summer Gathering in 2017 as well as other Quaker events I've been to such as the London Link and BYM.

We had meeting for worship in the mornings and epilogues in the evenings along with base groups for discussion.

We had various people who came to talk to us, for example, a civil rights activist, an MP and a prison socialist. Most of these were very interesting although I found some were a little heavy going. The MP talked about Brexit; while I appreciate that this is an important subject nationally, it didn't really excite me as I am not into politics. Perhaps I should be!!

During our spare time, I entered a table tennis tournament (unfortunately I came fourth out of 16), played on my phone and talked to my friends. Some of the other things we did were to go to Oxford, go swimming and build a buzzing game.

I was really pleased and so excited to go back to Leighton Park that when it was time to leave I didn't want to go as I had had such a good time. Roll on 2019 so I can go again!!

Joshua Edgson

Junior Yearly Meeting Epistle

Junior Yearly Meeting met between 4 and 7 May 2018 to explore the theme: 'Quaker faith in practice: What are our beliefs and how can we express them?'

There was a strong sense of community over this weekend. Indeed we learnt from Melinda Wenner Bradley (a Friend from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting) that Community is one of the Quaker testimonies in the USA. In addition to Melinda, we were delighted to welcome into our community Jo Harris from the United Reformed Church, as well as Rhiannon Grant from the Revision Preparation Group.

Worship was one element of the event which helped us feel closer, and gave us space for spiritual development. In particular, we appreciated the diversity in the different ways of exploring our spirituality, such as the guided meditation epilogue which many felt enabled them to open up and be themselves. We gave and heard powerful ministry in our worship, which further inspired many of us to better connect with our spiritual side.

In part due to the speaker's young age, Chris Alton's Swarthmore Lecture about being creative in effecting change in the world, resonated with us well. The lecture was humorous as well as eye-opening and encouraged us to think about how we could make a difference in our communities and our lives or, in his words, 'may we go forth and reshape the world'.

Through our Meeting for Worship for Business we wrote a minute to voice our community's sense that we should revise *Quaker Faith & Practice*. This was read before Yearly Meeting where the decision was made. We appreciated the chance to be involved in the decision – through our minute and young people's ministry in Yearly Meeting session – and expressed a wish to be involved in the revision itself.

The smaller communities of base groups enabled us to discuss further our thoughts and feelings and of course to have lots of fun and meet new people. Our 'Where am I?' orienteering game and quiz were other sources of great enjoyment and helped us to grow even closer together while the final night's ceilidh was a fitting finale to an inspiring and memorable weekend.

Over the weekend we learnt more about our own beliefs and reflected on how we could express these in Quakerism and the wider world. Friendships were forged and strengthened, and we leave in the knowledge that as a community we can achieve great things.

As one participant said: 'JYM is an experience that I'm never going to forget'.

**Signed in and on behalf of Junior Yearly Meeting 2018
Arjun Nanning Ramamurthy, Daniel O'Toole, Clerks of JYM 2018**

The Tao Te Ching - the Way and the Power of the Way

The Tao Te Ching, (Tao- Way, Te-virtue, Ching- classic scripture), an instruction for living without preconceived ideas, written on bamboo in archaic Chinese, was probably written by a man called Lao-Tzu ('old boy') around six hundred years BCE. It has eighty-one short chapters and is written partly in verse and partly in prose. It is thought possible that Lao-Tzu may have lived at the same time as Confucius. Scholars have studied this work for generations and there are many

translations and commentaries. This classic piece has been divided into the philosophical and religious path that we may understand as Taoism. Alan Watts, the great Buddhist teacher, referred to the Tao as 'the watercourse ways'.

I came across this wondrous text some years ago on a weekend at Claridge House and I have been dipping into it ever since. To study the Tao Te Ching is the work of a lifetime but here are a few thoughts prompted by my memories of the course.

Ursula le Guin, who published a wonderful rendition in 1997, describes the work as 'the most lovable of all the great religious texts, funny, keen, kind, modest...of all the deep springs, this is the purest water'. Heaven and earth are one. 'As you walk the streets of your town, you walk on the Way of heaven'. Christ's words many years later perhaps have a similar meaning: 'Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thy standest is holy ground'. (Acts 7:33).

It has been translated into English more than any other great Chinese work. Le Guin mentions that it is said that when one tries to follow the Way, good things happen to us, even if we do not deserve them!

Lao-Tzu has much to say on treading lightly in life in order to work naturally and simply with each day as it comes. To let go of overly firm beliefs, self-importance and ideologies which may, after all, be culturally imposed upon us. He counsels us not to hoard or show off:

*To bear and not to own;
To act and not lay claim;
To do the work and let it go
Is what makes it stay.*

Le Guin comments in her notes that we are being advised that to think that our beliefs are 'permanent truths which encompass reality is a sad arrogance'. Sometimes to let go of a belief or a fear is to find safety. Lao -Tzu is not keen on holding tightly onto life but suggests instead that we take care but without undue anxiety. He gives us pointers to practice such as:

*To run things,
Don't fuss with them,
Nobody who fusses
Is fit to run things.*

As somebody who has done more than her fair share of fussing, I can only bow to this ancient wisdom and be mindful about doing better! Fewer attempts at controlling, interfering and forcing and more trust in working in harmony with life.

The grandmaster of Taoism is, of course, that beloved bear, Winnie -the- Pooh. Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh*, is a delightful little book which highlights that 'Eeyore frets, Piglet hesitates and Owl pontificates. Pooh just is'. Hoff asserts that within each of us 'there is an Owl, a Rabbit, an Eeyore and a Pooh. For too long we have chosen the way of Owl and Rabbit. Now, like Eeyore we complain of the results'. Like Pooh we can listen to the voice of wisdom and simplicity within, beyond 'Cleverness and Knowledge'.

There is that within us that knows which stone to take out of the wall - which is the right action.

Lao-Tzu Tao Te Ching, A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way, Ursula le Guin
(Shambhala)

The Tao of Pooh, Benjamin Hoff (Egmont Press).

Barbara Earl

Cohousing

I first heard about cohousing several years ago through the Living Witness Project, a network of Quakers particularly concerned about climate change. Cohousing was started in Scandinavia by parents wishing to share childcare, but many groups in Europe and North America are for 'seniors'. Cohousing communities vary greatly. Some have converted country houses with extensive grounds, growing food and keeping livestock, whereas others are urban co-operatives providing social housing. However there are certain common characteristics:

- Each household has its own private space, which may be owned, part-owned or rented, depending on the type of community;
- There is a common house, normally with shared cooking and dining areas. The community

decides what else should be included, such as guest rooms, laundry facilities, tool-stores and cycle-sheds;

- Cohousing is usually designed by the prospective residents so as to encourage informal meeting in the common areas, inside or outdoors;
- The members aim to create a self-managing community, managed by all the residents. Communities decide themselves on their legal structure, rules and how often they will hold meetings and share meals, work and other activities;
- Cohousing communities are inclusive and usually contribute to the wider community.

Cohousing could help provide solutions to a number of pressing problems. There is an urgent housing crisis, particularly in London. One cause is the shortage, and therefore high cost, of land. If the UK is to reduce its carbon emissions sufficiently we need to make much better use of our scarce land, for example to plant forests. Cohousing residents often have a smaller private space than they otherwise would, knowing they can share the common facilities. Most cohousing communities aim to live more sustainably, and encourage sharing resources like transport, appliances and food.

There is increasing evidence about the effects of social isolation on health and even life expectancy, particularly in older people. Cohousing communities aim to be 'good neighbours', where residents see other people regularly, whilst in most cases also contributing to the local community.

The Government have recognised the contribution that community-led housing (of which cohousing is one type) can make by allocating some limited funding to support start-ups.

The group that I have joined, 'Still Green', started in Milton Keynes Meeting, where some Friends came together to make provision for living well and independently in later life. It is set up legally as a Community Interest Company. Membership is not restricted to Quakers and we aim to be diverse and inclusive. The aim is to design and build a cohousing community for people over 50 in Milton Keynes. More recently the group has also been considering a project at Graven Hill, planned by the Government as a 'new town' on the outskirts of Bicester, where a large area has been designated for 'self-build' housing. As with most cohousing, identifying suitable land at an affordable price is the major problem at the moment, but there have been encouraging discussions with local authorities.

For more information about cohousing in the UK visit <https://cohousing.org.uk/>.

Rhiannon Rees

The issue of generational handover - again

...at the latest Sea of Faith annual conference at Warwick University in July

The week got off to a good start: a trip to the Oxted Everyman to see *Mamma Mia: here we go again*. It was great fun, full of energy with oldies, Christine Baranski, Julie Walters, Cher – yes, Cher – and (too little) Meryl Streep. The songs, of course, were the old Abba favourites. But the plot was carried by two young women, Lily James and Amanda Seyfried. The message was clear: the songs may be familiar (and very singalongable) but the young people must take over for life to go on.

That, of course, brings me to the Sea of Faith Conference held a couple of days later (24-26 July 2018) at the University of Leicester. It was well-organised with lots of friendly, welcoming people, some of whom clearly had known each other for years. Don Cupitt, himself, the Sea of Faith instigator, and now eighty-four years old, attended on the first day. The conference theme was 'The Necessity of Hope' which was discussed in both the main sessions and in some of the smaller workshop groups. One speaker, Andrew Teverson, argued that hope is viewed in different ways by different generations....the reality of hope changes as we age....when we are young, we hope for ourselves; when we are old, we hope for others.

This concern over the passage of time was voiced in another theme that emerged from John Pearson's report as chairman. The members of the Sea of Faith group could be said to share a view that religion is a poetic and/or philosophical vision and in this way God has been and is created by human beings. This is the Enlightenment perspective upon which the SoF organisation was founded and, over the years, it has offered discussion and support to its members with which

this uncertainty can be explored. Like everything else, Gods/gods – yours and mine - evolve. There are always new things to find and this is worthwhile and necessary as - importantly - religion can free us from contemporary entrapments such as materialism.

This view of religion – perhaps once held by a minority in society – could be said today to be pretty much a mainstream view. It's hardly controversial in many circles (including Quaker ones). But, reflecting the polarisation that does seem to be a characteristic of contemporary life, some people still want certainty and with that, unconditional hope. Hence, the evangelical revival that is occurring in the Church of England. This has resulted in some of the Anglican members of the SoF seemingly being as much outsiders in their churches as they were twenty, thirty years ago and hence the importance of SoF friendship to them. The big question for the conference seemed to be: what to do as membership is declining? (In 2006-7, there were 525 members; today there are 266 members most of whom, if the conference was anything to go by, are now over sixty). So the SoF organisation is faced with the not unfamiliar (certainly to Quakers) need for an appropriate outreach strategy: how does it attract new and young members to keep the discussion meaningful and vibrant?

Sea of Faith: www.sofn.org.uk .

Helen Johnson

Premises update

The scaffolding will go up on Tuesday 4th September. We have had to clear the car park by the ASH, and we thank the Unitarians next door for allowing us to use their car park spaces. This means that the gutters and roof will be checked and repaired as required. There is a great deal of work to be done, including renewing the meeting house floor and putting in a new kitchen, but we have no date for either of these. The ASH kitchen is getting a much-needed ventilator, but no news yet of when the drains will be sorted out.

NCS, the National Citizens Service, who have been using the ASH for the last two months, have finished their time with us. We have been happy to offer them so much space for their activities, and on the whole the young people have respected the building and grounds. A group of them were able to raise money for Jo Doherty's antenatal clinic, and helped her pack 90 hospital bags for the expectant mothers to take to the maternity hospital when about to give birth. Unfortunately, by the end of the last week, end of term-itis crept in and we had a series of problems with discipline, including graffiti sprayed on the walls. Reports in the Press voice doubts that NCS will continue to receive a grant for the summer activities, so we wait and see.

Gillian Turner

Book review: 'The Inner Level', by Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett

The book *The Spirit Level*, by the same authors, showed by many statistical examples how the countries with the greatest inequality had the greatest social problems, which affect both rich and poor. It led to the formation of the Equality Trust, which campaigns for greater equality. *The Inner Level* is on the same theme, but related to the psychological and emotional effects of inequality, in particular the questions of stress and status. The book is now in our library. It is not an easy read, but worth skimming through and pondering the conclusions. The sub-title is 'How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Well-being'.

Barbara Cairn (Epsom Friends Newsletter)

Events

Ongoing till December: 100 Years Peace, Protest, Conflict. Exhibition at Museum of Croydon, Croydon Clocktower, Katherine St, Croydon CR9 1ET. Entrance free.

Ongoing till December: Art of Peace exhibition. An artistic response to the themes of peace, protest and conflict which complements the exhibition in the Croydon Now gallery.

Thursday 6 September: Diana Francis Peace Work. 19:30 to 21:15 at Kingston Quaker Centre, Fairfield, East KT1 2PT. Diana Francis will outline her life in peace activism and her professional work supporting peacemakers in different parts of the world, reflecting on the role of the faith and other things that have motivated, strengthened and sustained her, and on what she has learnt thus far. Continued on 15 September.

Saturday 8 September: Increasing Diversity. How understanding our Unconscious Biases can help/make a difference. 2 - 4.30pm at Friends House. London Quakers offers a participative and practical workshop on Unconscious Bias. 'We have heard the call to examine our own diversity'. YMG 2017 affirmed our commitment to a more diverse Society of Friends, but what can we do? Facilitated by Carey Haslam who is an experienced trainer and facilitator with a background in inclusion & diversity, mediation & conflict resolution. Free. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/increasing-diversity-how-understanding-our-unconscious-biases-can-helpmake-a-difference-tickets-48238445489>.

Sunday 9 September: Local business meeting from 12.15. All welcome.

Saturday 15 September: More from Diana Francis. 19:30 to 21:15 at Kingston Quaker Centre. After a time for reflection on her earlier talk (see 6 September) Diana will facilitate a practical workshop for us to experiment with the practice of 'civil courage' in responding actively to destructive or cruel behaviour we may encounter in day to day life. As time permits we will go on to consider the different approaches that may be necessary in other situations.

Sunday 16 September: Area meeting. Meeting of Friends within South London Area Meeting (Epsom, Croydon, Purley, Streatham & Brixton, Sutton) at Croydon mh from 12.30pm.

Monday 17 September: The Prayer Game playday, Quaker Centre Bookshop. A drop-in event for a new card game, and resource for personal reflection. Come any time between 11 and 3pm and play - takes about half an hour. Games for sale.

Tuesday 18 September: Leavening the Spirit. The Leaveners have been energising Quakers for nearly half a century, now they work as Friends in Tune This entertaining presentation by Tony Biggin and Alec Davison tells the stories of the Leaveners' music-making and will include recordings from their musicals, cantatas and oratorios. The Quaker Cafe will be open for drinks and food beforehand.

Saturday 22 September: Open House at Blackheath Meeting 10:00 – 16:00, Blackheath mh, Lawn Terrace, London SE3 9LL.

Sunday 23 September: Mary Jakeman on Advices & Queries. In our fourth-Sunday talk Mary will lead a session on 'Advices and Queries: how they have helped me in my life - what about you?'

Sunday 23 September: Learning about hospice work 13:30 to 14:30 at Muswell Hill mh, Church Crescent, London N10 3NE Friends are warmly invited to Muswell Hill Meeting's discussion lunch, following 11.00 worship, to hear Joe Attridge speaking to local Quakers about his service at the North London Hospice.

Sunday 29 September to 7 October: QUAKER WEEK

Collected in July and August

July 2 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad 60.50 YM 180.00

9 South London Area Meeting 26.00 AM 123.00 3

16 Woodbrooke 80.00

23 Croydon Local Meeting 84.00 LM 321.00

30 Support and Help in Education (SHINE) 35.00

August 6 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad 86.00

13 Croydon Refugee Centre 85.00

20 South London Area Meeting 43.00

27 Mind in Croydon 83.00

Collecting in September: 6 Quaker work, 13 Croydon Local Meeting, 20 Friends World Committee for Consultation 27 WAVE (Worldwide Alternatives to Violence)

The deadline for the October edition is Sunday September 30 2018

**Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner
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