

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

September 2020

Dear Friends September newsletter marks, not just our emergence from lockdown, but our meeting together at last, for meeting for worship. During August we have been having blended meetings with up to 20 Friends in the Adult School Hall and the rest joined with us on Zoom. Our premises are now open for hirers, those who can meet together in small groups to walk or have coffee and to chat, and we keep in touch with those still shielded at home by phone or Zoom. This month we host our Area Meeting, and so the life of our Quaker Community continues.

Gillian Turner, David Parlett

Advices and Queries 9: *In worship we enter with reverence into communion with God and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Come to meeting for worship with heart and mind prepared. Yield yourself and all your outward concerns to God's guidance so that you may find 'the evil weakening in you and the good raised up'.*

'The Boy, the mole, the fox and the Horse'

During the first weeks of Lockdown many of us read Charlie Mackesy's book about love, friendship and kindness, illustrated with beautiful ink drawings.

'We often wait for kindness . . . but being kind to yourself can start now' said the mole.

'Everyone is a bit scared' said the horse. 'But we are less scared together,'

'What is the bravest thing you've ever said?' asked the boy.

'Help.' said the horse.

'Sometimes just getting up and carrying on is brave and magnificent.' said the horse.

'When the big things feel out of control ... focus on what you love right under your nose.'

'I've learned how to be in the present....I find a quiet spot and shut my eyes and breathe.'

News of Friends

We send loving greetings to those Friends we are in contact with us only by phone or through this newsletter. Since Lockdown we have been meeting online, by Zoom, through WhatsApp and Messenger, and at last, since August, at meetings for worship in the Adult School Hall. We are hoping, as the weather gets colder, that we will be able to meet in the meeting house both in person and via Zoom. There are a number of Friends who are still shielded and unable to leave their homes, and we send them too our loving greetings.

Peter Taylor keeps in touch regularly. His health has been stable though he still suffers from asthma. He has recently been diagnosed with an umbilical hernia, but he is still able to go out for his daily exercise. He sends all his friends at the meeting his best wishes.

Ben and Mary Underwood hope to complete the sale on Anthea's old house and are planning to move to Eastbourne.

Philip Barron, a Croydon Friend of many years standing, remains well looked-after in Cedar View Care Home. The home has been thankfully free of the coronavirus, but his daughter Liz tells me (DP) that visitors can only meet residents in the gardens and Philip's dementia is such that he finds the windy weather too disturbing. The photo (right) of Philip and Liz appears on the Cedar View web page.

Mary Clarke, in Burrell Mead Residential home, has been visited by Margie Ashley and Kay Papadopoulos. Margie reports that Mary is looking well and enjoys sitting in the garden with visitors when she gets the chance.



Gemma Tighe writes: this September, I'll be taking the Ration Challenge and raising money to help provide emergency food, hygiene kits and life-saving support to Syrian refugees as well as supporting Concern's wider work of ending hunger and extreme poverty in the world's poorest places.

What will I be eating? Just a small amount of rice, flour, lentils, chickpeas, beans, fish and oil. That's it! No coffee, no sugar, no alcohol.

Please sponsor me and support my fundraising efforts. As little as £39 can provide a refugee with food rations for three months, and £63 can fund medical referrals for five refugees!

We're all affected by the coronavirus, but not equally. Sponsor me today and let's show refugees we really are #inthistogether.

Simply click on my fundraising page link below to support my Ration Challenge and provide life-saving support for refugees.

<https://www.rationchallenge.org.uk/gemma-tighe>

Thank you so much for your support – it is truly appreciated.

My Cornish visit during lockdown

Having two dogs with us and two grandchildren we often took woodland walks, again almost deserted. It was great exploring unknown places, seeing old clay workings. One was Tregargus Valley and on the old clay dry. We climbed up round the old chimney stack having a marvellous view across the valley. We came across the old watermill, a massive 30-foot wheel in use until 1965. The dogs and boys ran about enjoying new places like the 'settling pond' with large strips of concrete allowing the water to drain and clay to dry.

This visit included Golitha Falls, beautiful woods, the river Fowey, rain, thunder, sunshine. In the woods we didn't really feel the rain, apart from underfoot. On the way back I managed to slip and caused much laughter. No broken bones, but very muddy. I wasn't too stiff next day as I had to walk back to the car park.

St. Austell meeting house opened up on 1 September for their lettings. The first group in are the Home Farm Trust who work with adults with learning difficulties using the premises twice a week. Their Meeting for Worship is still by Zoom only.

My visit to Cornwall was the best possible thing to do and I am just so pleased I did. Three other Friends visited Cornwall during August and went to many of the same spots.

Margie Ashley



Cathy Spence has used lockdown to develop her love of gardening, and has shared her delight when her sunflowers bloomed by posting a photo on our Quaker WhatsApp group. Jade thought Gordon looked like a tv gardener, Cynthia offered Bill and Ben the Flowerpot Men. Mary mentioned Bob Harris but that drew a blank until Barbara told us he was a famous DJ from the 70s Whispering Bob... The Old Grey Whistle Test. Cathy could see the resemblance and Helen wrote the following article.

Promptings of the heart

The conversation of the What's App group recently mentioned Bob Harris – yes, Whispering Bob Harris himself. Of course, you have to be of a certain age, and I certainly am, to remember the Gordon Spence lookalike who introduced 'The Old Grey Whistle Test' for so many years when music was really music. (At this point, young people, that is everybody under sixty can grip the edge of the table. Yes, this is more oldie talk). Think of the names: Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills and Nash, the Mamas and Papas, the Carpenters.... be warned, I could easily go on... and on.... and on.....

There do seem to be lots of programmes on television about the world fifty or so years ago.

Perhaps the age group that remembers and might be interested is the one that has time to explore memories as we stay at home trying to stay alive in the way the lockdown, quarantine, guidelines (whatever it's called at the moment) determine. Perhaps we are looking for something to watch. One series that immediately comes to mind about significant things that happened then and had a definite impact on today is the BBC series *Mrs America*. It tells the story of women's rights activists in the USA in the 1960s and 70s – paradoxically, by focusing on one woman who opposed such advances, Phyllis Schlafly – and their names are familiar enough: Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug.

Interestingly enough, Gloria Steinem herself hasn't been much impressed by the series, and for what it's worth, neither was I. There's so much on television that, much I as try to keep up, just seems not very impressive or worthwhile. There you go. The dialogue seemed stale, the arguments not particularly well presented and some of it historically inaccurate. By the time I'd reached the third or thereabouts episode, I was looking for an excuse to give up. And then as I watched something strange happened. Suddenly this song started in the background. It was Mama Cass and she was singing *Make your Own Kind of Music*. It isn't the greatest song ever written – but I love the words - and Mama Cass wasn't the greatest singer (but, somehow, she remains so poignantly representative of that era). But if the sound of the song was unexpected, so was my reaction. Quite simply, and I know this is the greatest cliché in the book, I was taken back to the 1970s. I just sat and felt that feeling of connection, of being there.

So, the scripts in the television series aren't impressive but the emotional connection made through the music is real. Rational arguments come and go, but emotional reactions are profound. In this case, this was one that recalls what it was to be young and optimistic about the future. Was there something in *Advices & Queries* that touches on this point? It doesn't take much searching... the first one puts it: *Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to the new life.*

Well said. Point taken.

Helen Johnson

An On and Off Lockdown with Benefits

As a freelance Medical Herbalist giving face-to-face consultations and a professional Advanced First Aider at events my work fizzled to nothing in early March. I started growing a not insignificant number of veggies, thinking that times were hard and Nature is bountiful. Suddenly I was offered some ambulance work in Essex and did some shifts over five weeks. The work got steadily quieter and the work ended, and with it the long hike by public transport. I was glad to get down to the domestic sorting and rationalising that so many people had well underway.

A few weeks and it was bearing visible fruit: my decks were clearing, the veggies thriving and increasingly me too. Not able to listen to Radio 4 or much News for anxiety, but drawn to wildlife programmes and books, I had the mental space at last to enjoy them. The work void felt odd, but the increasing freedom meant I could go walking and cycling again, in a new, socially distanced way.

Suddenly again a desperate call for First Aider staff at the Albert Hall for the behind-closed-door Proms, and the odd other event work of old populated the diary. How exciting it was to get ready for a shift and set off for work! I feel slightly ambivalent to be benefitting from Covid-19. But somebody has to take temperatures, I suppose!

Katharine Locke

Soften the Glare

When our fortnightly Discussion Group was able to meet in person, I remember that during one session we went off on a tangent about the error of repeating old interpersonal mistakes, such as interrupting others, not listening actively to one another, offering unwanted, perhaps inappropriate advice, etc. One Friend said that when she caught herself doing this she would self-scold, saying 'and don't do that again!'. How to avoid the re-run of unskilful behaviour and knee-jerk responses? Thích Nhất Hạnh, the revered Vietnamese Buddhist monk and teacher, gives aid as he explains that, owing to attachment, anger and foolishness, we commit 'numberless mistakes in speech, deed and thought'. For me, this much is clear. He goes on to suggest a helpful practice:

*I bow my head and repent.
I vow from today to begin anew, to live day and night in mindfulness,
And not repeat my previous mistakes.*

Alan Watts, the late Chislehurst-born writer and speaker who brought much understanding of Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist thought to the West, points out the benefits of what he calls freedom from 'busybodiness' and being out to improve everything. Watts says that once free of this compulsion 'your own nature will begin to take care of itself, because you are not getting in the way of yourself all the time'.

Our own *Advices & Queries* provides much in the way of guidance when in times of stress, relationships and connections may seem complex and we might be triggered into adopting well-worn but less-than-helpful responses. I know from listening to Friends that the following words taken from the last part of A&Q 17 offer balm:

Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

600 years BCE, Lao Tzu in his profound classic *Tao Te Ching*, had much to say on focussing upon one's own motivations, behaviour and deportment and refraining from judging others. I like the following from Chapter 4:

*Blunt the sharpness,
Untangle the knot,
Soften the glare,
Merge with the dust,
Hidden deep but ever present.
This is Tao!*

Barbara Earl

Thích Nhất Hạnh: *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (Rider)

Alan Watts: *What is Life?* (YouTube)

Ursula Le Guin: *Tao Te Ching* (Shambhala)

Ninian's Catechism

Question: What is best in the world?

Answer: To do the will of our Maker.

Question: What is his will?

Answer: That we should live according to the laws of his creation.

Question: How do we know the laws?

Answer: By study – studying the Scriptures with devotion.

Question: What tool has our Maker provided for this study?

Answer: The intellect which can probe everything.

Question: And what is the fruit of study?

Answer: To perceive the eternal Word of God reflected in every plant, and insect, every bird and animal, and every man and woman.

From *Celtic Daily Light*, compiled by Ray Simpson for 25 August.

Joyce Trotman

An exploration of RS Thomas

The unexpected highlight of my summer has been a slow and happy exploration of the poems of RS Thomas. My quest began when I found Thomas cited in Mark Oakley's *The Collage of God* – which is itself a beautiful (and short!) account of Christian faith, organised not according to any systematic or rational framework, but by what Oakley has learned through his own religious experiences. As a warning against imposing our own limited systems onto the Divine, he quotes RS Thomas' poem *Raptor*:

'You have made God small / setting him astride / a pipette or a retort / studying the bubbles /

absorbed in an experiment / that will come to nothing. // I think of him rather / as an enormous owl / abroad in the shadows, / brushing me sometimes / with his wing so the blood / in my veins freezes, able // to find his way from one / soul to another because / he can see in the dark.'

Even in these few short lines, there is so much that chimes with Quaker approaches to the Divine. While we do talk of knowing God 'experimentally', it is precisely to reject the narrow 'experiment' Thomas describes here: pained theologising, precision, dogma, the need to be in control. Instead, God is known by personal acquaintance – or, in other words, by revelation. Words make sense of experience, and only if they 'improve the silence', not the other way around.

What words are best? Quakers seem most comfortable with images of 'Light'. And yet, as we still our minds in the silence of a Meeting for Worship, we surely all recognise the sense of fleeting contact and deep mystery that Thomas conveys with the image of 'an enormous owl', moving between us in the dark.

I was pleased to find the same interplay between light and dark – the sense of expectant waiting alongside flashes of something revealed – weaving through many of Thomas's other poems. In *Folk Tale*, for example, he reflects that he would have 'refrained long since' from praying 'but that peering once / through my locked fingers / I thought that I detected / the movement of a curtain.' At the same time, the hours (or perhaps years?) spent watching and praying hold as much meaning as the 'movement of a curtain'. As in the poem *Kneeling*, 'When I speak, though it be [God] who speak / Through me, something is lost. The meaning is in the waiting'. And again, in *Questions*, 'Silence is the message. / The message is... Wait.'

The recognition that the mystery, the silence, and the waiting might express as much of the nature of faith (and even of God) as the ecstasy and excitement of ministry is, to me at least, what makes Thomas's poetry so rich, so honest, and so compelling. I have not found a better expression of what draws me to Meeting each week.

For this reason, I was intrigued to start reading online articles about his work. Many of them explore the 'contradictions' of his faith (he was an Anglican priest for most of his adult life). I kept reading about the 'paradox' of poems that speak both of silence and presence – and indeed, of religious poetry that is so preoccupied by the 'absence' of God. If I had not already read his poems, I would be expecting something totally different: doubt, melancholy, and disappointment. Instead, I just read them as so clearly expressing something true and meaningful about spiritual experience: hope, leading to revelation. It never occurred to me to read them as paradoxical.

This has got me thinking about what it means to grow up a Quaker (as I did), and so to have your spiritual instincts incubated in silent worship, rather than a more conventional faith setting. At the very least, silence doesn't need to mean absence. Perhaps we become so comfortable with the paradoxes that we stop noticing them? It also encourages me that Quakers have something valuable to offer a world which is so often noisy, confused, and over-stimulated. Ours is a message that the world needs to hear – though perhaps without words. **Maddy Pennington**

Events

Sunday 13 September Our local business meeting will take place at 1pm via Zoom.

Sunday 20 September South London Area business meeting, also at 1pm via Zoom. We will have three reports of visits to applicants for membership, and the main topic of business will be that of Quaker governance, for which we are pleased to welcome Juliet Prager, Deputy Recording Clerk of BYM.

Woodbrooke online, 17 October – 14 November (five consecutive Saturdays): *The Keithian Controversy: Early Quakers and Jesus*, led by **Madeleine Pennington**. How did the early Quakers understand the relationship between Quakerism and Christianity? What is the significance of the historical Jesus to Quaker spirituality? These were the central issues in the Keithian controversy: a dispute which broke out among Philadelphian Quakers in the seventeenth century when George Keith – one of the most important Quaker leaders at the time – was accused of focusing too heavily on the historical Jesus in his preaching. The same issues have emerged in every major Quaker schism ever since. This course will introduce participants to George Keith, guide them through the main events and causes of the Keithian controversy, and consider the significance of

the controversy for Quakerism today. The course is comprised of Live speaker sessions, Live discussion sessions, Written and visual materials, A private discussion forum, and Individual reflection. Live sessions are on Saturdays at 10:00-11:30. Cost: £54. Book at: <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/item/the-keithian-controversy-early-quakers-and-jesus/>

Memorials to Mary Jakeman

We are about to receive the generous legacy left to us by our Friend Mary Jakeman. At our July business meeting, we received three suggestions for use of a small part of this money. We really liked these ideas, which we thought were appropriate memorials to Mary, as they illustrate some of her many interests and concerns, and we agreed all three.

The first was for an archive chest to go in the Friends room, to store all the Meeting's historic papers and maps. We decided to add a photograph of Mary with a note or plaque stating that it came from her legacy. This matches well both her interest in history and her appreciation of quality items.

Another was to buy a new refrigerator for the kitchen, as Mary was deeply involved with the update of the kitchen, at which time there was not enough money for a new fridge.

The final suggestion was to make a donation to Woodbrooke, which runs a range of courses for attenders and new Members. This was in recognition of Mary's interest in helping attenders and new Friends to learn about the Society, its work and history.

These suggestions arose from a casual conversation, before we had had a chance to ask everyone if they had any thoughts about the use of the money, and turned out, as these things often do, to be just right. However, there is still a lot of the money left, so, if you have other ideas, please let the clerking team know.

Margaret Skelton

The Righteous Mind (book review)

In *The Righteous Mind - Why good people are divided by politics and religion*, psychologist Jonathan Haidt sets out his thesis that people make moral judgments on the basis of emotion or gut instinct, rather than on reason, and this to such an extent that when put to the test they often have difficulty in finding rational explanations for the judgments they make.

To test this, he devised a number of real-life but imaginary situations in which people acted in a certain way and asked his guinea-pigs to judge whether or not what the characters had done was 'morally wrong'. The situations described, involving such behaviours as incest and cannibalism, were deliberately designed to provoke feelings of disgust or distastefulness, and it was remarkable to see what intellectual contortions some of them had to go through to explain why they thought something was morally wrong. On the whole, it was people belonging to what he terms the WEIRD community (White - Educated - Industrialised - Rich - Democratic-as-opposed-to-Republican) who said although they might feel disgusted they nevertheless couldn't condemn the events on purely moral grounds.

Haidt is fond of animal-based images. He speaks of the rational tail trying to wag the emotional dog; in another, we are '90% chimp and 10% bee; and in another, more sustained throughout, he speaks of the lumbering elephant of our emotional constitution and its puny, rational driver, whom we try to address in an attempt to shift the elephant from its path by an appeal to reason. It's a striking image - whenever he mentions 'your elephant' you know exactly what he's talking about. No translation needed.

Where do 'moral wrongs' end and 'social conventions' begin? It's obvious that not all societies have the same social conventions, and that what appeals to some might well disgust others. (I once ate horse-meat steak, and found it preferable to beef, but would draw the line at dog.) There is also the point that westerners tend to be more individualistic than Asian people, who perceive themselves primarily as component units of a family, clan or nation.

Haidt argues that whether we lean towards a conservative or a liberal perception of morality is a matter of genetic disposition, though such leanings may be either enhanced or reduced by upbringing and experience. In a chapter entitled *The Conservative Advantage* Haidt posits five 'foundations' of moral perception as: care, fairness, loyalty, authority, sanctity. On the whole, he argues, cultural liberals are primarily concerned with care and fairness, and to some extent loyalty, while cultural conservatives base their morality on all five foundations, albeit with

significant emphasis on authority and sanctity. Thus the 'advantage' he perceives is the greater ability of conservatives than liberals to appeal to people across the whole spectrum of emotions.

As Haidt is a social and cultural psychologist at the University of Virginia, I couldn't help wondering whether he might not be acquainted with the lines from *Iolanthe* that sprang immediately to my mind: *Then let's rejoice with loud Fal la – Fal la! / That Nature always does contrive – Fal la la! / That every boy and every gal/ That's born into the world alive / Is either a little Liberal / Or else a little Conservative!* **David Parlett**

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind - Why good people are divided by politics and religion* (Penguin Books 2012)

P.S. Please note that I now exclusively use my mobile, which enables me to hear better, and no longer answer (or even hear) the landline phone. My mobile number is 07905 679 246. **Also:** my email address for Quaker-related messages remains **quakers@parlett.eu**. If and when I have to give up my .eu domains it will be quakers@davpar.uk. Please don't use anything else. -**DP**

Quaker Cricket

During the 1960s an annual cricket match took place between teams from Croydon and Sutton Meetings. The instigators were John Harper of Croydon and Arthur White of Sutton. There is a record of an early match being held in Beddington Park, which Sutton narrowly lost, but subsequent matches were played on the recreation ground in Sanderstead. These contests were recorded in The Friend, 22 July 1966, by its then editor Clifford Haig, as follows:

Cricket is a serious business, and I have always deprecated the irreverent approach of those church fete organisers who go in for comic cricket matches. Friends know better. They prefer what are called friendly matches, in which an apparently permissive atmosphere barely conceals the serious nature of the conflict in which the opposing factions are engaged.

Any resemblance to a comic cricket match is thus superficial. If the teams' attire shows some signs of improvisation, this merely reflects Friends' distaste for uniformity and outward show. If some of the batsmen's strokes seem a shade eccentric, this is not humour but a deliberate unorthodoxy. These reflections occurred to me after the annual match between Croydon and Sutton Friends, at Sanderstead last Saturday. They did not occur to me at the time because (a) they are too profound, and (b) I was too busy enjoying the cricket, keeping warm, and trying to work out whether the variations in pace, flight and direction in the deliveries of a well-known bowler were deliberate or something else.

I suppose I ought to report the result. Sutton Friends (captained by Arthur White) won handsomely. The Croydon team (led by John Harper) batted first and scored 87 (S. Watling 28, Maurice Skeet 34), Terry White taking 4 wickets for 24. Sutton replied with 121 for 4 (Robert Horn 30, Gordon Steel 40, Timothy Addey 30 not out) before play was brought to a close by light showers and a spirit of compassion, in the cool of the evening.



These matches have been played for ten years or more now, thanks to the determination of the two chief protagonists that their followers shall not escape this annual exercise.

(This article is from the July issue of the Sutton LQM newsletter. Some of the score books are preserved in the Sutton Meeting archives. The image shows (L to R) Ronald Abbott, Ken Bulled, Norman Ford, Pat Steel, Kathleen & Ronald Walker.)

Collecting in September

Sep 1 - South London Area Meeting
Sep 20 - Worldwide Alternatives to Violence (WAVE)
Sep 27 - Britain Yearly Meeting

The deadline for the October edition is Sunday 27 September 2020
Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to
Gillian Turner *Te/07805087981 email/gillianturner033@gmail.com*

But the silence in the mind
is when we live best, within
listening distance of the silence
we call God. This is the deep
calling to deep of the psalm-
writer, the bottomless ocean
we launch the armada of
our thoughts on, never arriving.
It is a presence, then,
whose margins are our margins;
that calls us out over our
own fathoms. What to do
but draw a little nearer to
such ubiquity by remaining still?

RS Thomas