

**MANCHESTER & WARRINGTON AREA QUAKER MEETING
NEWSLETTER NO 34 AUGUST 2024**



Flowers at Sale

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Spiritual Gardens Past and Present
by Nicholas J Tyldesley Citizen of Bolton.

God's Garden

The Lord God planted a garden
In the first white days of the world,
And he set there an angel warden
In a garment of light enfurled

So near to the peace of heaven
That the hawk might nest with the wren,
For there in the cool of the even
God walked with the first of men.

And I dream that these garden-closes
With their shade and sun-flecked sod
And their lillies and bowers of roses,
Were laid by the hand of God.

The kiss of the sun for a pardon,
The songs of the birds for mirth,
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth

For He broke it for us in a garden
Under the olive trees
Where the angel of strength was the warden
And the soul of the world found ease.

Dorothy Frances Gurney

Gardens have long been associated with spiritual beliefs throughout history. This spans the Garden of Eden to the Heavenly Garden in Revelations. So what happens in between? The

Egyptian took their earthly possessions with them after death so put pictures of their gardens on the tomb walls. Their gardens were designed as cool, peaceful, enclosed havens with water features, formal and rectangular in shape. Plants like water lilies, lotus flowers, papyrus and tamarind were sacred to the gods. This sense of formality continues in Islamic Gardens like the Alhambra. "Garden" and "Paradise" were synonymous. The gardens were divided in quadrants representing the elements. In the Sufi tradition, gardens were seen as places for sensual relaxation with roses as significant blooms [representing the teardrops on Mohammad's face on his way to heaven]. The Romans always built a small altar where sacrifices were made each day to test the omens. There were trompe d'oeil religious paintings on the walls. Box hedges and a fountain featured with roses, fruit trees, oleanders and laurels as common plants. On the other hand the Greeks, wilder olive groves were the locations for weddings and funerals with a noisy chorus of hysterical "Furies" as an accompaniment.



Monastery gardens combined a utilitarian need for food production and herbal medicines with space for the religious orders to enjoy silent contemplations walking round cloister courtyards. "Mary's

Gardens” were small enclaves planted with significant flowers like violets, lily of the valley, and marigolds reflecting aspects of her life as a focus for prayers and candle. This theme of contemplation is key to the classic Japanese Zen garden where a minimalist design copies the earthy world with pebbles for the seas and rocks for islands-the only vegetation being moss.

So, how do all these examples resonate in modern times and what would a Quaker inspired garden look like? Respect for the natural environment and the beauty of nature is an important Quaker belief of course along with taking a delight in a simple space for meditation. Making a garden bee and wild-life friendly should be a priority. Growing food and culinary items like herbs have the advantages of reducing food costs and achieving tasty flavours. Trees we know can improve air quality.



But simply letting a garden run wild with no weeding or cutting back is not the answer. Wilful neglect shows a careless attitude - wild flower meadows still need mowing and invasive species weeded out. Bringing in help from our Children’s Meetings, local primary schools as well as opening up the space to vulnerable adults, those with neurodiverse conditions or dementia will encourage a

community dialogue and outreach. Monet's garden is a riot of colours, all merging with each other, helping to suppress the weeds and despite Quaker reservations about self-indulgent sensuality, bright blooms, even simple sunflowers can raise all our spirits in gloomy times. Perennials and shrubs offer easy maintenance rather than always replenishing bedding annuals. A suitable theme might be to develop a sensory garden- wind chimes, tinkling water, rustling glasses and lots of fragrances helping to increase our empathy with nature.



There is the issue of slugs and weed- do we simply let nature take its course or agonise about the precise definition of a weed. Obviously we go for organic compost, being peat free. Optional extras might be rockeries and sculptures. The Chinese wanted to replicate mountains [the haunts of the gods] in their gardens and had stone lions to guard things.

Gardens are loving constructs, constantly changing according to the seasons and weathers. They offer a real opportunity for Friends to develop closer bonds with nature in a spirit of love and challenge. The National Arboretum featuring a tribute to Quakers and the Peace Testimony gives an inspiration for meetings to continue gardening.

BUILDING TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WORKSHOP ON SATURDAY 23 NOVEMBER

At our April Area Meeting in Warrington, it was agreed that Conflict Advisory Group would organise a one-day workshop probably from 10am to 4pm one Saturday, run by Adam Scott, a chartered psychologist who has run helpful conflict advisory courses at Luther King House in Manchester previously. The aim is to give ordinary Friends the skills to deal with possible conflicts within our Quaker communities, ideally before they become serious. Conflict is a part of life, and we need to know how to handle it and learn and grow from it, so it becomes something creative, rather than just seeing it as a problem.

We have now fixed a date for the workshop – Saturday 23 November at South Manchester Friends Meeting House. Conflict Advisory Group (which now consists just of Elizabeth Coleman and Robert Wilson) hopes to work with Adam and ideally a representative from Elders and/or PCT in planning the session.

Please put 23 November in your diaries.

We are asked to promote it to Friends across the area and in neighbouring areas.

REMAINING AREA MEETING DATES IN 2024

Thursday October 3rd - 6:30 for 7pm Central Manchester and online (hybrid)

Tuesday December 3rd - 6:30 for 7pm start by zoom only

DISCUSSION AFTER MEETING FOR WORSHIP AT ECCLES

According to BBC News, Nigel Farage has been criticised for suggesting the West "provoked" Russia's invasion of Ukraine by expanding the European Union and NATO military alliance eastwards. The Reform UK leader told the BBC that "of course" the war was President Vladimir Putin's fault. But he added that the expansion of the EU and NATO gave him a "reason" to tell the Russian people "they're coming for us again".

Quakers had some sympathy with Farage's views. Farage's views have been widely condemned, but it is generally better to listen to, understand and discuss ideas rather than simply to condemn them. Wars are generally not simply a matter of good against evil – each side has its history and point of view. You can only get rid of ideas by killing the people who hold them, (which is not the Quaker way.)

SONGS OF PRAISE

Songs of Praise has been recorded at Swarthmore Hall to commemorate the 400th anniversary of George Fox, and Keith Archer of Eccles LM was there. We think that the programme will be broadcast on Sunday 11 August on BBC1 at 1.15pm.

QUAKER CONGO PARTNERSHIP VISIT TO UVIRA **by Cathy Putz, QCP Trustee, 2 July**

We've arrived in Uvira DRC. Hotel Victoria by Lake Tanganika, cool breeze, a beer. Much of the road after border flooded. So it's either a Pirogue or a 4×4. Met by Quaker Congo Partnership colleagues, useful meeting and planning the week ahead and now relaxing.



Hospital supported by QCP



THOUGHTS ON THE PURPOSE OF YEARLY MEETING **by Elizabeth Coleman**

Quakers meeting in London in 1668 wrote: “We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another’s faces, and open our hearts to one another in the Truth of God once a year.” This was the original purpose of Yearly Meeting.

The purpose of Yearly Meeting now seems to be primarily to involve as many people as possible in decision making.

We get fewer and fewer opportunities to meet “in person” with Friends who are not from our own Area Meeting. In the relaxed atmosphere of a residential setting, where we are not tired from travel, or tempted to leave early because of travel, we get the best opportunity to “open our hearts to one another.” Both residential Yearly Meetings and Woodbrooke used to provide this. But I have just received the Woodbrooke brochure, and almost all courses are online. And there are no plans for a residential Yearly Meeting. I think the reason for this is that it was decided that Yearly Meeting must always be “blended,” so that as many people as possible can take part, and this cannot currently be provided at residential meetings, though they are working on it. I am not clear who made the decision not to have a residential Yearly Meeting until this is resolved.

When do we feel joy at being Quakers? Our local and area meetings are the bread-and-butter essentials. But it is often time at Woodbrooke, or residential Yearly Meetings, that really give joy and inspiration. I remember with gratitude taking part twice in a course at Swarthmore Hall that was an exploration of 1652 country, and we went out in a minibus to visit sites each day, and stayed at Swarthmore, so there was plenty of time for conversation and sharing.

Yesterday I attended an online meeting entitled “We all make Yearly Meeting,” and a number of people felt that the blended meetings were a big improvement because of their inclusivity. But there is more than one purpose of Yearly Meeting – not just to make decisions, but also to enjoy being together, with opportunities to meet old friends, make new friends, and have conversations in a relaxed way that are really important for our life as Quakers. Not everyone feels easy in large blended meetings, or feels that Quaker worship and decision-making really work in this context.

Face-to-face contact can be undervalued. I think of the people in care homes who were denied visitors during Covid. I’ve been in hospital, and a stream of people come into your room, medical ones, people asking what you want for lunch, bringing lunch, clearing up after lunch, changing bedding, giving personal care, cleaning the room. All these people were probably seen as essential for the care home residents, but visits from friends and family were not, even when they were dying. When you are dying, you may care more about seeing your loved ones than having your room cleaned. The mental health issues suffered by young people during Covid are evidence of how important face-to-face contact is.

How can we reconcile the different purposes and needs, rather than just assuming that the overriding purpose of Yearly Meeting is to involve as many people as possible in decision making?

WORLD PLENARY

Dear Friends,

The World Plenary should be a great opportunity for Friends to gather perspectives on crucial issues of our time, not least on climate justice and righting the wrongs of past exploitation (reparations).

We hope that Witness Groups will alert their members to these opportunities. Specifically inviting them to come to the on-line Hub to be held at Mount Street FMH on August 7th (9-3); 9th (9-1.30) and 10th (9-5). The Hub will be following the theme of: **healing historical injustice.** (See page 26 for more detail.)

In Friendship

Jonathan Dale

CONFLICT MINERALS CAMPAIGN

Let the people of Congo (DRC) benefit from their mineral wealth

Conflict Minerals Campaign held a Special Interest Group at Yearly Meeting on 9 July. We showed a video of George Bani and Joel Amani, our members in East Congo, talking about why they got involved in CMC, and about their activities: visiting mining areas, educating local people about their rights when affected by mining, bringing different parties together for discussions, broadcasting a radio programme, talking to politicians and others about the work of CMC, setting up local groups in mining areas.

Sandra Dutson of Eccles meeting talked about our work in the UK, including raising issues at a major Batteries Exhibition in Birmingham, making a submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee on Critical Minerals, speaking at a Fair Trade meeting in the House of Commons, and plans for a possible exhibition in Manchester museums.

Below is the link to the video, which is on YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/FsnWemDrbVg>



Joel on a visit to a mining area

FAITH NETWORK FOR MANCHESTER (FN4M)

FN4M held its AGM on 8 July at Cross St Chapel, Cross Street, Manchester. NHS project leads, representatives of several faith traditions and members of other local Interfaith groups were there. The Lord Mayor of Manchester, Paul Andrew spoke of his hope that FN4M will continue to play a role in promoting harmony and peace.

Health Awareness raising, both physical and mental, is another central part of FN4M's work, as shown in Answer Cancer initiative and the new Women's Group and a Men's Groups. These are designed to bring together people of different faiths to go for walks and to get to know each other as individuals, talking about issues of common concern. Another new initiative is Faith Tours, where visits to places of worship in different local areas are arranged. This is, again, to meet people from the communities and to learn about different faiths. The first Faith Tour was to a Sikh gurdwara and nearby Ahmadi mosque in Moss Side, on Wednesday 17th July.

Booking is essential for all of these activities.

If you want more information, or are interested in getting involved, talk to Margaret Calvert of Sale Meeting.

margaretcavert@hotmail.com or admin@fn4m.org



Visit to Gurdwara in Moss Side 17 July

QUAKER ACTION ON ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

In July, Robert Wilson and Sharon Powell of Eccles LM attended a QAAD event at Launde Abbey, Leicester. Robert took these pictures of Launde Abbey and the grounds in the day and peaceful twilight. He hopes we may soon invite QAAD to visit Manchester and Warrington for a one day QAADNET event.



Sharon writes, “We both attended the QAAD 2024 Conference – ‘The Power of Truth: Breaking through stigma, Letting in the Light’, held at Launde Abbey in Leicester. The weekend was a balance of Worship and rest and working through a voluntary programme of activities including an Open Space discussion group, a creative workshop exploring the stigma of addiction, a discussion – ‘The Power of Forgiveness: The Quaker Pathway. There was an Open 12 Step Fellowship meeting and a film – ‘One in Five’, highlighting the number of young people dealing with family members addictions and the stigma and fear they face. A lot to absorb and challenge but the weekend was accepting of every individuals necessary presence and held in a close, spiritual communion. Below is a poem written by a Friends’ daughter, Viv, who is struggling with her long term addiction with alcohol and drugs and is currently in recovery. Her daughter has given permission to publish the poem.”

NOTE TO SELF

Big up yourself my struggling friend,
Making it right from the start of the day to the end.
Your daily battle brings me inspiration,
Doing this take boredom, tears, and frustration.
Walk down the road with your old life beckoning,
Everyday feeling like your day of reckoning.
You've got more strength than you dare to believe
Walking forward through the dark even when you cant
see.

Let me give you some important information :
I can see your light, AND I know your situation.
I know what goes on behind closed doors,
Your heart and mind are fighting in a war.
But when I first saw you, your light shone,
It gave me motivation to keep moving on.
Your doing something now that you couldn't do before,
Years ago you couldn't even see the door.
So when your world looks shit as far as you can see,
Remember 'it's all part of life's rich tapestry'

HA!

Weave that in my cloak- I'll wear it.
I've been through hell, I can bear it.
It's looking in the mirror that bothers me,
Some day's I really don't like what I see.
I walk in a room, I think 'everybody knows '
Feeling paranoid and so the fear grows.
But the world's not so small or as narrow as we think
No one knows of the life that's been tipped down the
sink.

Stranger's don't know, or perhaps even care
We all have our dramas and life isn't fair.
I put myself in this hole, I can get myself out...
I hold onto this in my moments of doubt.
No matter how long, no matter how dark,
There is nothing in this world as strong as my heart.
Your doing it now, your on the road to recovery
Everyday a voyage of self re-discovery.
So even when you feel sorry for yourself
Someone else may see a picture of health.
Remember it's all case of perspective
Past present future, all are connected.
No one can see you the way that you do
But sometimes what you see just is not true,
You will always be your own harshest judge
Painted a masterpiece, ripped it up cos it smudged...
Alright, you're not doing as well as you could,
Progress is slow, but you know what? It's all good.
The world keeps on turning, nothing stays the same,
This is part of your journey, and this too will change.



A new statue at Launde Abbey – “Welcoming Christ”

FLAMENCO FUNDRAISER FOR QUAKER CONGO PARTNERSHIP

On Saturday 13 July, Hebden Bridge Flamenco put on a concert in Didsbury Baptist Church to raise funds for Quaker Congo Partnership.

The event was organised by one of the Trustees of QCP, who, as a Trustee, contributes her skills of fluent French-speaking and knowledge of conflict resolution. However, she is woman of many talents, and as well as introducing the concert, she was the Flamenco singer, singing in Spanish, and one of the dancers.



Flamenco music comes from a different stream from Western music, and the rhythms are complicated and not familiar to us. They may use 12 beats (unfamiliar to us) or 8 beats (not so strange.) The dancers express the rhythms not only in movement but also in sounds – we hear the clicking and stamping of the heels and the castanets, as well as the guitar accompaniment. Songs may be on themes of love, or loneliness in a strange land. Apparently even the ones that sound happy have sad words.

Quaker Congo Partnership UK (QCP UK) has worked with Congolese Quakers in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since 2009. Its core projects - a rural hospital, trauma counselling, supplying clean water, peace building and a scheme giving women the skills and resources to improve their livelihood - benefit 40,000 people living close to Lake Tanganyika and the Congolese border with Burundi.

The concert was to raise money specifically for the women's projects of QCP, which are a relatively small part of its work. Many of the women are breadwinners for their large families, supporting the older and the younger generation. With quite small amounts of money from QCP, they achieve a lot. They make soap, which saved lives in Africa even before Covid, and became so important when Covid struck, that they began to give away soap to those who could not afford to buy it. Soapmaking is skilled work, and can be dangerous as caustic soda is used, but the women were fortunate in receiving good training from a skilled soap maker. They had a few treadle sewing machines, (as electricity cannot be relied on,) but they needed repair. Now they have a handful of working sewing machines, which are in continuous use, shared by a number of families on a shift basis. They rented a large field, and have succeeded in growing vegetables, despite drought and flood. There is also a numeracy and literacy project.

During the break in the middle of the concert, there was "bring and share" food, mainly Spanish food. It was a very enjoyable evening, and over £300 was raised for Quaker Congo Partnership.

To donate, go to:

<https://www.quakercongo.org.uk/Womens-Development/>

RHS BRIDGWATER VISIT

On Tuesday 20 August, there will be a visit to RHS Bridgwater. This will be under the umbrella of “Skills Sharing,” as anyone who is a member of NHS Bridgwater can bring a guest free, and that guest might donate to the good causes supported by the Skill Sharing project (Quaker Congo Partnership and Quaker Work Fund – see Note 1 below). All are welcome to come, and some may need to pay for entrance, as there may not be enough members to provide free entrance for all. There is a bus direct from Piccadilly Gardens to RHS Bridgwater. If you would like to join us, contact Sandra Dutson, (though no need to let us know, you can just arrive.) We haven’t yet fixed details of when we arrive etc. If the weather is really bad, the visit may be postponed or cancelled.

Note 1

The Quaker Work Fund is a small Area Meeting fund which funds work that furthers the Quaker Testimonies of truth and integrity; justice, equality and community; simplicity; peace; and the earth and the environment. The work must have a Quaker connection, and preferably direct involvement of Quakers.

QUAKER HOUSING TRUST

Grace Burgess of Quaker Housing Trust will join us at our Social Justice Group meeting on August 22 to introduce discussion on housing justice. Grace is keen to hear local Friends' views. All are welcome – you may choose just to come for the housing item, which will be at the start of the agenda, and will not last more than 30 minutes. The meeting starts at 7.15pm.

Zoom link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86100146478?pwd=VINWc-ThDcnJEZ0IMTE1naU1eVp0QT09>

Meeting ID: 861 0014 6478

Passcode: 801527

22 SEPTEMBER – SAVE THE DATE

Dear Friends,

This is just to give you advance notice of an exciting event which is taking place at Central Manchester Meeting House on Sunday 22 September between 2.00 and 4.00pm, preceded by a bring your own lunch session at 1.00. Of course you are also very welcome to join Manchester Friends' Meeting for Worship at 10.30am.

On this occasion you will be able to hear

Lancaster Friend Ann Morgan speak about the research that has been done to date on the complex relationship between British Quakers, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and economic exploitation. Her own pioneering work on this subject focused on Lancaster and the North West. Ann will be joined by Dr Natalie Zacek from the University of Manchester who has studied the historical links between Manchester civic society (including its University), the cotton industry and slavery.

The precise format of this event has not yet been decided but in addition to presenting work already completed we hope that Ann and Natalie will speak and take questions about the possibility of future research into North West Quakers and slavery and how this might feed into BYM conversations about how reparations might be made for Quaker involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism.

More details will be circulated nearer the date of 22nd September, but in the meantime do make a note of this occasion in your diaries.

In Friendship,

The Racial Justice Steering Group

World Plenary Meeting of the FWCC can be joined remotely at Central Manchester Meeting House

The Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) World Plenary Meeting is taking place between 5-12 August. Although the in-person proceedings will take place in South Africa, much of the meeting will also be online and Friends worldwide have an unprecedented opportunity to join in, both as individuals and as groups connected to Zoom hubs. CM Meeting House will host a hub on Wednesday 7th, Friday 9th, Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th August in G1, where you can participate in the World Plenary gathering alongside other Quakers from our region. Importantly there is an online study guide to help us all arrive with 'hearts and minds prepared' at <https://fwcc.world/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Study-Guide-ONLINE.pdf>.

The overall theme of the World Plenary is 'Living the Spirit of *Ubuntu*: Responding with Hope to God's call to cherish Creation and One Another'. *Ubuntu* means 'I am because we are'. There are three streams to the World Plenary. We will be following the stream *Healing and repair of relationships in light of historical and continuing injustice*. This will present a unique opportunity for us as British Quakers to gather African and other global south perspectives on crucial issues of our time, not least on righting the wrongs of past exploitation (reparations) and furthering both racial justice and climate justice.

There are several kinds of session that will take place in our hub. They include online worship with Friends around the world; thematic sessions comprising prepared ministry and contributions from online participants; and hybrid sessions where in-person delegates will be in conversation with online participants. These are immediately followed by

'home group' sessions where we will speak to each other in the meeting house about what we have just heard online. You can choose to attend every session, but it will be OK to drop into sessions of your choice.

At Central Manchester the programme for each of the four days is as follows:

Wednesday 7th

9.00-10.15 Plenary Worship led by the FWCC's Africa Section

10.15-10.45 Pause for reflections and refreshments (hot drinks and biscuits provided)

10.45-12.15 Thematic session 1 - on *Healing and repair of relationships in light of historical and continuing injustice*

12.15-1.30 Home group session with people present in G1 and lunch (bring your own)

Participants may leave at 1.00 in order to attend CM's Wednesday meeting (1.10-1.40)

Friday 9th

9.00-10.15 Plenary Worship led by the FWCC's Europe and Middle East Section

10.15-10.45 Pause for reflections and refreshments (hot drinks and biscuits provided)

10.45-12.15 Thematic session 2 - on *Healing and repair of relationships in light of historical and continuing injustice*

12.15-1.30 Home group session with people present in G1 and lunch (bring your own)

1.30-3.00 Plenary Keynote Speech (Speaker TBC) and panel discussion

Saturday 10th

9.00-10.15 Plenary Worship led by the FWCC's Asia West Pacific Section

10.15-10.45 Pause for reflections and refreshments (hot drinks and biscuits provided)

10.45-12.15 Hybrid session (in-person participants) 3 - on the theme of *Healing and repair of relationships in light of historical and continuing injustice*

12.15-1.30 Home group session with people present in G1

1.30-3.30 Break for Lunch (bring your own) and free time

3.30-5.00 Hybrid plenary session: weaving all three thematic streams (Ubuntu, care for creation and healing historical and continuing injustices) leading to a concluding minute

Sunday 11th

9.00-10.15 Plenary Worship led by the FWCC's Africa Section 'All in Worship'

This will be followed directly by CM's Sunday meeting for worship (10.30-11.30)

Although it is not required, it would be helpful to let Penelope Gouk (penny@gouk.org.uk) know in advance if you are planning to come to part or all of this event.



A rose in Eccles garden

LOVE

Love is connection. Being loving means being open, open to a person, or to people, not just being kind...Kindness is directed at something, while open lovingness is just pure giving. And in my view, inspired within today's meeting, being loved is also endless, like a sunrise that moves along, rushing over the earth, the sun, always present. So love is a great sweeping connection of all of us.

Wendy Olsen (Eccles LM)



THERE ARE NOW SIX QUAKER MPs (info from The Friend)

Steffan Aquarone (Lib Dem MP for North Norfolk);
Ruth Cadbury (Labour MP for Brentford & Isleworth);
Carla Denyer (Green Party co-leader and MP for Bristol Central);
Josh Fenton-Glynn (Labour MP for Calder Valley);
Catherine West (Labour MP for Hornsey & Friern Barnet);
Yuan Yang (Labour MP for Earley & Woodley).

LAKENHEATH USAF BASE, SUFFOLK



Robert and Sharon of Eccles LM visited on 20 July

MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS

Kate Hughes attended Meeting for Sufferings on Zoom on 1 June as our alternate representative. She will be our representative from August 2024.

It was decided to re-register Quaker Concern over Population as a Quaker Recognised Body for two years. There was concern that it could be interpreted as rather judgemental on global south societies with larger nos of children in families. However, this was a global warming concern stemming from awareness that growing populations, particularly in richer countries, had negative impacts on emissions and the use of natural resources.

They received a report from the Clerk of BYM Trustees suggesting that we endeavour to disagree with one another in such a way as to build up our community rather than to break the ties of solidarity.

This reading was in the report: *“Part of the creative experience of a community is learning how to deal with conflict when it arises, and Friends are not usually good at this. ‘Speaking the truth in love’ is a Quaker cliché, but ‘papering over the cracks’ is the principle more commonly acted upon. Conflict met in ‘brokenness’ of spirit can take a meeting a long way on its spiritual journey, whereas unresolved, it deadens the life.”* (Qf&p 10.22)

This led to discussion on communications, managing conflict within our meetings and in reparations work. (Editor’s note – We are having a workshop on Building Transformational Relationships on 23 November – see page 7)

They heard about the ongoing work in Palestine and Israel and considered, in light of the ongoing situation, whether work in this area needs to adapt, in particular looking at the language that is used in relation to the conflict. They listened and saw a slide presentation on how we might support our Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI)

HONEYSUCKLE IN ECCLES GARDEN



WHO ARE OUR TRUSTEES?

The Trustees of Manchester & Warrington Area Quaker Meeting are:

Beck Solway (Clerk)

Richard Taylor (Treasurer)

Kate Conway

Sharon Powell

Valerie Clark

Andrew Wood

Christine Camacho

Ruth Turnock

Jeffrey Dean

Margaret Calvert

Kath Redmond

The Directors of Quaker Trading (Manchester & Warrington) Ltd are:

Ian Cook

Sandra Dutson

Alan Franco

Conor Jerram

Enid Pinch

Richard Taylor (Ex officio as AM Treasurer)

Martha Whitehead

(Liz O'Neill is Secretary)

Information on Trustees is publicly available on the Charity Commission website.

Information on Directors is publicly available on Companies House website.

AREA MEETING

Area Meeting was held at Eccles on 21 July. Items discussed included:

Future of our Meeting Houses

We have been told that hundreds of thousands of pounds of planned maintenance is needed over the next five years, and this has led us to consider whether we can afford to retain all our meeting houses. Wendy Hampton, our Regional Development Officer, has agreed to help us with the process of thinking this through, and we aim to have an initial meeting on 7th, 8th or 12th August by Zoom. Trustees will provide financial information. The process will not be hurried, and will involve as many Friends as possible, including discussion at local meeting level as well as at AM level.

Future of Teenage General Meeting (for young people aged 13 – 18)

Wirral and Chester AM has run TGM for 16 years, and is no longer able to do so. We have been asked if we could take on this responsibility. (We already run Summer School for young people.) TGM runs 3 or 4 weekends a year where teenagers stay at meeting houses, with speakers and excursions, and teenagers find the experience very valuable. We asked Richard and Tom Taylor to arrange a meeting in Manchester with people from all 7 Area Meetings, and bring back proposals. If we took on TGM, we would have overall responsibility, but would want volunteers from the other AMs for much of the work involved.

Grant to Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) from Quaker Work Fund

We agreed a grant of £1,250 towards the cost of a summer beach trip to Formby, where the women and children can forget the struggles of their day to day lives, with space to picnic, sing and dance, and for the children to play and go into the sea.

VOTE TO SCRAP THE TWO CHILD BENEFIT LIMIT

Society will be judged by how we treat our most vulnerable citizens

Attributed to Gandhi

Keir Starmer has suspended seven MPs from the Labour party because they voted to scrap the two-child benefit limit. Rebecca Long-Bailey, MP for Salford and Eccles, was one of the seven. None of the 4 Quaker Labour MP's was.

Child Poverty Action Group says that 300,000 children would be lifted out of poverty if the two-child limit was removed.

There is a strong link between poverty and mental health issues. A Save the Children spokesperson said, "A childhood blighted by poverty and poor mental health leads to dreadful outcomes for young people that sadly impacts them for the rest of their life."

THE BIG FEED

by Anna Bunney

The Big Feed is a campaign by Wythenshawe Churches Together to provide free food based activities over the summer holidays. South Manchester Quakers are joining in with an event on Friday 2 August 4-6pm. I represent South Manchester Quakers on the group and I am keen to open up our meeting house to local people, as well as providing our fellow people of faith across the local area. Part of the thinking behind this campaign is to both celebrate Wythenshawe as a local area, but also to highlight the persistence of food poverty. One of the activities on the day, is signing a table cloth provided by the Trussel Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation for their Essentials Guarantee campaign.

www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials/



Revisiting The Quaker Tapestry by Nick Tyldesley Citizen of Bolton

Meeting up with long-standing non-Quaker friends I took them to see the Quaker Tapestry. I had visited the exhibition previously both in Kendal and when it came to Blackburn Cathedral on tour, some years ago. But it was certainly worth a revisit on this occasion. The narrative of the rise of Quakerism is detailed and well told. My friends were impressed and felt that they now had a much better understanding of Quakers.

The atmosphere in the Exhibition is peaceful and reflective, allowing visitors to wander around as they choose without feeling lectured at. Each panel contains a wealth of information- apart from the text there are some many exquisite, tiny details that bring people and history alive: from the lace collars on people in a crowd to the interiors of Swarthmore Hall and prisons. This visual feast is supported by an excellent video that puts the achievements and character of George Fox into the general context. As a bonus, on the day we visited there were two Friends in Residence who were there in a corner doing their own embroidery and very happy to talk about their needlework. But is The Quaker Tapestry more than just a tasteful museum display, good for occupying a wet afternoon in the Lakes?

Clearly it is valuable in understanding the historical foundations of Quakerism and the heroic efforts of Early Friends. It is informative about the spread of Quakerism overseas; the contributions Quakers made to science, industry and botany plus the peace testimony. The role of George Fox is particularly emphasised. We are all part of History and this resonated with the constant debate about preserving meeting houses which have a special spiritual ambience because of their past. Walking up Pendle Hill takes this awareness outside. The aesthetic appeal of the tapestry is an effective way of telling others about Quaker faith and practice.

Taking the tapestry on the road was a good piece of outreach.

But do Friends today feel quite so positive about the doings of Early Friends? George Fox's Journal is not an easy read and his tendency to verbally and physically abuse his opponents is a problem to accept. Patriarchal attitudes towards indigenous people in America and the separation of men and women in meetings likewise is not a view we would accept today. Further doubts exist about involvements with slavery and the manufacture of weapons of war at Coalbrookdale. The mid C17th world picture is very different from our own: we are far less versed in biblical scholarship and understanding; don't worry about a Second Coming so much; can't cope perhaps with very long MFW and have abandoned the strict rules of dress and forms of address and yes, we do enjoy theatre and dancing. Our historical perspectives do tend to focus on WW2 and the Tudors with popular costume dramas giving a sanitised, inaccurate view of the past.

Quakerism is perhaps at a crossroads as we focus on climate change, environmental pollution, diversity/equality issues in our contemporary world. Would it matter very much if the story of early Friends just disappeared into the mists of time along with vague memories of individuals in bonnets and wide-brimmed hats? Are we still in essence the Religious Society of Friends? Do we use the bible as a source for ministry. Do we retain an image of God drawn from the King James's Bible? What would Fox think if he came to our meeting?

“Tradition” is an integral part of most religions – giving theological certainty; a structure for worship and familiar word and images. Quakers do take a more relaxed view of this dependence on the past but has something being lost if we forget our own history as displayed in The Tapestry in Kendal? I think so.

MISLEADING MEDIA - UNTRUTH AND LACK OF INTEGRITY

by Elizabeth Coleman

The general message from the media seems to be that Jeremy Corbyn was very unpopular with the electorate, and Keir Starmer has done much better. However, at the last election, Labour gained only 34% of the votes, but, because of the vagaries of the first past the post system, got 63% of seats at Westminster. In fact, Labour got a lot more votes (40%) under Jeremy Corbyn.

The BBC commented on the election results in 2017, that the Labour result exceeded all expectations. “Having begun the campaign 20 points behind in the polls, (Jeremy Corbyn) has won an astonishing 40% of the votes. That is the largest increase in the share of the vote by a Labour leader since Clement Attlee in 1945.”



Eccles garden



Hiroshima & Nagasaki Commemorative Events 6th and 9th August 2024 Please join the Lord Mayor of Manchester and Vice-President of Mayors for Peace, Councillor Paul Andrews, at these events in the world's first declared nuclear free city.

RSVP (if would be useful to know numbers) to Richard Outram, Mayors for Peace UK/Ireland Chapter Secretary

Richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk / 07583 097793

Hiroshima Commemorative Event

Tuesday 6th August 2024

1pm Prompt – 2pm

Minute of silence around 1.15pm.

Lincoln Square Peace Garden,
Central Manchester.

Nagasaki Commemorative Event

Friday 9th August 2024

10.45am Prompt – 11.45am

Minute of silence at 11.02am

The Western Pleasure Grounds
(next to the Farm Centre), Heaton
Park

Refreshments available from The
Stables Café.

MORE ON YEARLY MEETING

by Elizabeth Coleman

I am sure that some of you have attended Yearly Meeting, whether in person or online, and will welcome any contributions to the next newsletter about this. It would be especially good to hear from those who were inspired and felt a sense of joy from participating.

Some people can feel a deep sense of worship and unity in a large, blended meeting. I am not one of them. But I did attend two sessions of BYM online. In my view, our national decision-making is not working as it should. I am told that the decision to lay down Meeting for Sufferings has been “deeply tested” somewhere, but I don’t think this testing has been done at our local and area meetings. Apparently it has been decided that there will be a residential Yearly Meeting in 2027 (if the draft book of discipline is ready in time), and another 3 years later, and the main theme for both will be the revision of our book of discipline. I don’t know who decided this, or if I could have had any input to the decision and if so, how. It seems to me that the world is in crisis, and there are more important things to discuss than revision of our book of discipline, which I’m sure could be agreed in other ways.

(The decision to have residential meetings was recent, as when I last rang Friends House, there were no plans for one - see my article on page 11 - , but at BYM they said there were.)

‘ The Prison Psychiatrist’s Wife’ : an update

Sue Johnson, Central Manchester Meeting.

‘The Prison Psychiatrist’s Wife’ is a book I wrote about my experience of meeting men deemed disturbed psychopaths and sentenced to life imprisonment. It is also about my reflections on the then Parkhurst prison environment, the politics of imprisonment and an account of what happened to me and my husband when he tried and largely succeeded in a committed attempt to connect to and change these violent disturbed men.

Robert Wilson wrote a review of the book in the AM newsletter which I think some of you will have read. Since then I have written this Postscript after an amazing conversation with a man who had both read the book and been a life sentenced prisoner. He has also read the Postscript and agreed to it being used in this newsletter.

I feel that the Postscript is what I was searching for as an ending and positions the book as a moral as well as a practical challenge. I hope it can strengthen Quaker witness to the cruelty and uselessness of punishment and the possibilities of understanding and transformation in everyone.

My Publisher wants to put it in the next edition which is great. I will also be reading it out at a book reading at Greenhouse Books in Stockport where I will be in conversation with Lindsey Coulson. Lindsey is a lovely person who has a deep understanding of my writing she is also a well known and award winning actor perhaps best known for her role as Carol Jackson in Eastenders. The event is provisionally scheduled for Saturday 31st august from 5.30 -7pm, tickets are £5 and will be available from Greenhouse books website as soon as the date is confirmed. I am so excited as it will be a really interesting event. You can contact me at sue-jiow@icloud.com or mobile 07922 121703 if you want further information.

Postscript

And now it's over 30 years on from those Parkhurst days and I am sitting in a cafe in Manchester. Opposite me is a large self contained man, an observer cautiously protective of himself. His quietly spoken words reveal a perceptive intelligence. Y is a life sentenced prisoner recently released on licence after many many years and he has met some of Bobs men and has a granular experience of different prisons , psychologists, governors Psychiatrists , lawyers parole boards. He has read my book and I want to know what he thinks. I know it's truthful to my experience but is it truthful to his.

'It's a really good book Sue' he says, 'we had it hard but Bobs treatment was even worse. You had no friends . Bob comes home and say it's going to be alright don't worry but you knew it wasn't.'

A sudden hurt hits me; I had thought the pain was all rinsed out but this sudden total understanding penetrated. Turning away I stared through the cafes window and holding back the unbidden prickling in my eyes mumbled. .ohh

'I know' he said

What empathy to recognise the extremity of the pain,no one ever had. The peculiar pain of toiling, wanting to find an answer in an area of hostile bleakness finding it, rejoicing in it making progress only to have his patients, the men, forcibly removed , job stopped career destroyed and then attacks and prosecution for daring to talk about it.

He bends down to pat a dog from the next door table who is nosing around his ankles. It's an elegant dog warmly encased in a fashionable padded coat . Sorry says the owner as she gets up to leave .' No problem ' Y says 'I like dogs.'

We continue our conversation

‘ They say that was all a long time ago and it’s all different now.’

‘No’ Y says it’s got worse. Anyone who thinks like Bob soon leaves ...

And goes on to describe the construction of the cage.

I knew about the cage, it was specially constructed at enormous expense for one of Bobs special prisoners after Bob had gone.

But hearing the matter of fact way in which Y was describing its location its construction and its use was more than troubling. This was a conversation too real to bear. What he was describing was the total and brutal opposite to Bob’s work with the prisoner who was trying to slowly understand and change himself. It was clear too that this had a chilling resonance through the long term prisoner network. The end of hope as Charlie Bronson had written in his letter to Bob.

I learnt that while In prison Y had read about Bob’s work through the articles he wrote for *Inside time* a newspaper for prisoners .

He said it had given him some understanding and encouragement. *Maybe we had more influence than we ever realised* I thought.

But then Y goes on ‘ you can’t even do open university now’ he says flatly. The nihilistic enormity of this remark hovers between us. I can only faintly sigh.

‘What helped you most when you were released’ I asked, hoping, wanting to move on to more positive thoughts

‘There was nothing! Just interviews with psychologists, and probation officers. All they concentrate on is what you did not what you are like now’

It was V a social worker and Quaker prison chaplain who met him in prison and against all regulations had kept in constant touch.

She was a lifeline to his trust in others and himself.

Outside the cafe now we paused to say goodbye he was going one way I another. It was then I found myself saying with a quiet throw away bitterness

‘Ah well .. It was an impossible project ...doomed from the start me and Bob were ludicrous’ ‘No’ he said ‘They could have just let him carry on and train others and it would have spread to other prisons. It would have been a beacon’

My thoughts flashed back to the vision Bob and I had shared and now this man was sharing it too. And by sharing he was showing that the truth of what was begun all those years ago still remains.

‘Thanks’ I said ‘you are right’

Such ordinary words to close a sad yet life affirming conversation.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

If you are not on the mailing list, and would like to be emailed future copies of the Newsletter, email Mary Atkinson on admin@manchesterquakers.org.uk with your request.

Please send articles and photos for the Newsletter to elizcol@dialstart.net The deadline for newsletters is 5pm on the last day of the month. The deadline for the September newsletter is 5pm on 31 August. It can take time for an email to arrive, so I suggest that you aim for 30 August. I put almost everything I receive into the newsletter, with very little editing. Short items with pictures are best. Letters in response to articles in this newsletter are welcome. When submitting items for publication, please be aware that the newsletter is a public document, posted on our website, and we do not control who sees it. Think before submitting personal information, email addresses and photos. Try to avoid sending text and photos that are under copyright, and get consent from people in photos if needed.

Look at the website <https://www.manchesterquakers.org.uk> under “Newsletters and Events” if you’d like to see back-issues..

If you want to make contact with anyone who writes in the newsletter, and no contact details are given, email me elizcol@dialstart.net and I’ll forward your email to them.

Elizabeth Coleman, Editor 07969 385080