‘One of the clear messages was that there are no panaceas.’
Friends consider mental health
All our courses from January to July are now listed online and available to book. Whether you want to explore Quaker tradition, deepen your spirituality and witness, nurture your Quaker community or be equipped for a Quaker role we’ve got a course for you. The brochure will be mailed out by November.

To be added to our mailing list or update your details please email:
Mydata@woodbrooke.org.uk

Tel: 0121 472 5171
enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk
The loneliness which we rightly dread is not the absence of human faces and voices – it is the absence of love… Our wisdom therefore must lie in learning not to shrink from anything that may be in store for us, but so to grasp the master key of life as to be able to turn everything to good and fruitful account.

Caroline E Stephen, 1908

*Quaker faith & practice 22.30*
Protest demands money for climate not military

Friends took part in a protest outside the Ministry of Defence last month where campaigners physically counted the £5.2 billion that the UK is forecast to spend on nuclear weapons from 2018-2019. The activists counted 10,400 £500,000 notes in protest at what it described as ‘this terrible use of taxpayers’ money’ and demanded that the money should be spent on addressing the climate emergency instead.

The group Conscience: Taxes for Peace not War, which organised the protest, said: ‘It is almost impossible to imagine the horror that would be unleashed if just one of those nuclear weapons were ever used.’

Friend Karen Robinson, whose grandfather was a conscientious objector, said the figure was ‘impossible to comprehend.’

‘It was my grandmother who inspired me to join the peace movement,’ she said. ‘She talked of the boys and young men she knew who went off to the first world war and never came back.’

Quaker Robin Brookes, executive committee member of Conscience: Taxes for Peace not War, said: ‘I refuse to pay taxes for war. [It is] the most appalling use of public money to inflict violence on other human beings… We need to spend taxes on the means and institutions to solve the underlying problem in each conflict, not violently suppress people we don’t agree with. We need problem solvers in government, not warmongers.’

The Wiltshire Friend made the news in 2003 when he appeared before magistrates after refusing to pay his income tax because of the Iraq war.

Conscience: Taxes for Peace not War began as the Peace Tax Campaign in 1979, which was founded by Cornish Quaker Stanley Keeble.

Milford Haven Friends open wellbeing centre

Milford Haven Quakers have opened a meditation and wellbeing centre at their Meeting house after a long period of discernment. David Doorbar, clerk of the Meeting, said the decision to start the centre, which opened on 26 October, came after a long-term letting from a nursery ended and the Meeting felt ‘an urgent need’ to use the space.

He said: ‘A Threshing Meeting was held in which many ideas were put forward and constraints considered. It was important that it should continue to provide something of social value to the town, as well as being a source of income for the Meeting.’

According to David Doorbar, the Meeting began to discern a way forward when an attendant and wellbeing practitioner suggested renting the annexe. ‘We already let out another space to a Zen Buddhist group. Our own tradition is very contemplative, meditative and concerned with finding both inner and outward peace. Many wellbeing practitioners use meditation as part of their therapies. Bringing all this together, we considered that our entire establishment is effectively a Meeting house, meditation and wellbeing centre.’

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Who inspired me to join the peace movement,’ she said. ‘She talked of the boys and young men she knew who went off to the first world war and never came back.’

Quakers will hold leaders to account

Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) has pledged that it will be asking politicians searching questions in the run-up to the general election, as well as cautioning about ‘the nature of the debate’. ‘Quakers are concerned by the violent language being used in the political arena,’ it said. ‘They call on everyone involved in the general election to listen to each other, seek the truth and seek common ground from which to move forward.’

Of particular concern, it said, are other key areas: the climate crisis; migration; criminal justice; and peace and disarmament.

According to BYM, ‘humanity needs leaders of integrity and conscience, ready to be held to account by individuals and institutions, national and international’. It said the general election on 12 December is ‘an opportunity to influence future decision-makers’.

A number of Quakers are expected to stand for election and the Friend will be reporting this news as it develops.

Kings Lynn Quaker George Gawlinski spoke on BBC Norfolk this week on how faith bodies can speak truth to power and advocate for the

WORDS

‘An opportunity to influence future decision-makers.’

Britain Yearly Meeting’s call to action on the run-up to the general election on 12 December.
marginalised during the election period.

Friends can follow Quaker engagement with politicians on Twitter via @PoliticalQuaker and @ScotPolQuaker.

Essex Friend at Mexican conference
A Friend from Colchester Meeting spoke at an international congress in Mexico as part of her testimony as a Quaker in addressing ‘the needs of the most traumatised and vulnerable children and young people in our society’.

Social worker Jane Herd was given an education bursary by Southern East Anglia Area Meeting to speak at the sixth Juconi International Congress on developing peace, held in Mexico.

Over two days on 25 and 26 October, she gave a keynote address, two workshops and a panel presentation on subjects including reflective practice, managing stress and therapeutic fostering. The congress, which included 500 delegates from 117 countries, covered subjects including: migration, street children, family violence, and alternative family care.

Jane Herd told the Friend that it was an ‘exciting opportunity’. ‘I particularly wanted to assist my Mexican colleagues in thinking about fostering in the country, which is very new for them, as they only have had this in law since 2014 and have no clear policy or practice. The whole experience was fabulous and exhausting. It was really eye-opening to hear about the realities of working in a country with no real social security, abject poverty for some – including families living on the streets – and the high risk of violence, both in family and externally. Saying this, I have been staying in Puebla and have always felt safe.’

The social worker was asked to speak at the event because of her research at the Mulberry Bush School, which works with highly traumatised children.

£32.7m
The amount the UK has spent supporting fracking since 2011. The government issued a moratorium on fracking in the UK last week.

Peace banners on display
The Peace Museum in Bradford loaned twenty-eight peace banners to an exhibition at the Brierfield Mill in Pendle showcasing signs from the protest movement. According to Charlotte Hall, curator at The Peace Museum, the items were chosen for the exhibition Banner Culture to represent key points in peace history, such as the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp and the anti-nuclear movement, as well as protests against apartheid and wars in the Middle East.

Charlotte Hall said they were ‘thrilled… we have over 100 banners in our collection and it’s great seeing them in a new context, alongside an eclectic mix of banners representing so many important issues. The renewed interest in protest collections is exciting and we hope people come away feeling inspired. Other items in the exhibition, which is part of the British Textile Biennial event, were crowdsourced from artists and organisations across the UK, including: Durham Bannermakers, who keep alive the traditions of the miners’ groups; Thalia Campbell, whose work captured the resolve of Greenham women; Ed Hall, celebrated for his collaborations with artist Jeremy Deller; and Peter Carney who made memorials for the eighty-nine people lost at Hillsborough.
Friends celebrate fracking moratorium
Quakers are celebrating the moratorium on fracking in the UK that the government announced last week, but pressed for an outright ban.

Oliver Robertson, head of witness and worship for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), hailed the announcement by the secretary of state for business, energy and industrial strategy Andrea Leadsom on 2 November as a win for all those Quakers who’ve worked with others to oppose fracking. Climate scientists say we need to keep eighty per cent of known fossil fuel reserves in the ground. However, he said, ‘it is not the ban we are seeking. We continue to take action and advocate to keep fossil fuels where they belong – in the ground. We want investment in renewable, efficient energy that is affordable for all.’

Members of Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) tweeted that the government U-turn was ‘amazing news’ and said it was ‘all thanks to the sustained efforts of campaigners, activists and communities’.

Meanwhile other anti-fracking campaigners cheered the news while also registering their caution. While some campaigners expressed distrust of the announcement and predicted ‘if the Tories get in again it will be back in another name with a different definition that’s “perfectly safe”’, others vowed to enjoy ‘the taste of victory… while we can’.

The group Frack Free North West, which included campaigners from the Cuadrilla Preston New Road site where an earth tremor registering 2.9m in the summer caused damage to buildings, tweeted: ‘Moratorium rather than out and out ban. Who cares. Fracking dead in UK. Thousands of brave and dedicated campaigners against the toxic industry can perhaps get their lives back, enjoy family time, hobbies, holidays again. Well done, many thanks and love to all.’ The group pledged to campaign in the new year for an outright ban, while Reclaim the Power said: ‘A moratorium is only as good as a social movement that can hold it in place… so we must stay active, and stay vigilant.’

Elsewhere, others, such as the Scottish Youth Climate Strike, pointed out the irony of announcing the moratorium only days before the government approved a coal mine in Cumbria. Environmental campaigners have sent an open letter to the government calling on it to extend its moratorium on fracking to less publicised techniques used by the oil and gas industry, such as acid stimulation. This is often described as ‘fracking by stealth’. The letter says that controls around acid stimulation are ambiguous.

The moratorium on fracking has been issued due to concerns about earth tremors.

Play to help fight against poverty
Friends Lynn and David Morris were invited to perform their play about Quaker Ada Salter to mark the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The couple, who make up Journeymen Theatre, were invited by the local group of ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World to put on Red Flag over Bermondsey on 19 October in Bermondsey, London. The play was written and performed by Lynn Morris, and directed by David Morris.

Sheila Taylor, from the Quaker Socialist Society, told the Friend: ‘They came at midday to the Salter statues in Bermondsey, where the Salters lived and worked, and Lynn performed a scene from the play in costume by the river in front of around twenty people. Then in the afternoon she did the full play at the ATD centre to an audience of around fifty in Addington Square. It made a tremendous impact and got a standing ovation.’

NUMBERS

97.5

The percentage of respondents who rejected plans to fast-track fracking, according to a public consultation published on 4 November.
Thought for the week:

**Alison Leonard has a high old time**

‘But there was another aspect to Pendle Hill, beyond its personal challenge.’

Let’s be honest, Pendle Hill is one of the most boring hills to climb. For me, reared on the topography of the Lake District, this stony diagonal slope was tough. There’s not a knoll (a small rocky outcrop to you non-Cumbrians) to relieve the uphill struggle, nor is there a rushing ghyll (waterfall) to please the eye. There is no bench in memory of someone’s grandmother. But, fifty years a Quaker, here was my chance to stand as a pilgrim on the fabled peak. I should have taken heed of George Fox: ‘I spied a great high hill… I went on the top of it with much ado, it was so steep…’ So steep, in fact, that I called for my Quaker group to release me. I needed to go back down and rest my legs in the local pub. Sorry, Friends. At any rate my lager was alcohol-free.

So my romantic notion of a pilgrimage was subverted. But there was another aspect to Pendle Hill, beyond its personal challenge. It turned out that everyone we met wanted to talk, and most of them knew something about George Fox. He was a Quaker, they said. He climbed up here in the year 16-something. It was the beginning of… can’t quite remember…

When we said we were Quakers, they looked at us hopefully. Could we tell them about ‘the Quaker thing’? Indeed we could. George Fox was searching for the meaning of life; he hoped the clergy might tell him, but they couldn’t; he was in despair and climbed Pendle Hill; and there he realised that many, many people longed for a gospel of love, truth, simplicity, equality and peace. ‘That’s great!’ was the response, from all sorts of people: a group of primary children and their teachers, a Canadian tourist, an elderly Pakistani Muslim and his son, a humanist in the car park.

Reflecting on this a week later, while sitting round a campfire with local Extinction rebels as they related their experiences of rebellion in London, I pondered the nature of the ‘Quaker thing’ in Britain.

Quakers are rooted in the British way of life. We are recognised, and in many ways accepted, in mainstream society. Not for nothing are Quakers used to advertise foodstuffs like cocoa and porridge. It’s no accident that Friends founded many of the banks still used today. They – we – are a trusted thread in the web of how things work.

But we are also part of another web. It’s the one that goes deeper: deep into the conscience, deep into the soul, deep into the earth. It says: ‘Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God’s purposes’ (Advices & queries 35). It says: ‘We live answerable to the design of our creation’ (Quaker faith & practice 20.32). It says: ‘Try to live simply… We do not own the world’ (Advices & queries 41–42). Even if this places you, as Abigail Maxwell said in the Friend recently, ‘in Heaven and Hell simultaneously’, we must live adventurously.

Alison is from Brighouse West Yorkshire Meeting.
Letters

The Friend welcomes your views, to letters@thefriend.org. Please keep letters short. We particularly welcome contributions from children, written or illustrated.

Please include your full postal address, even when sending emails, along with your Meeting name or other Quaker affiliation.

In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.

Climate action
I read with interest the item on ‘Sustainability matters’ in the Meeting for Sufferings report (11 October). One way not mentioned where Friends can take action for climate justice is by encouraging organisations to divest – withdraw their investments from fossil fuel companies.

This is a worldwide movement that could have a great impact on how such companies move forward and it will support other companies who are more concerned about our environment. Friends have been contributing significant work in this area for some years now, not least through their involvement in Operation Noah; and our sustainability testimony is a key anchor for such work, which scientists tell us is now so very urgently needed to avoid real climate and ecological catastrophe.

Our Area Meeting has already divested from fossil fuel companies and Aylesbury Meeting is now campaigning for our county council to divest its substantial pension funds. Our campaign so far has included: writing an open letter to the pension fund committee, attending and addressing their meeting, having a slot on local radio, writing to the local press, and teaming up with our local Extinction Rebellion group. In this work we hope to combine our efforts with Quaker Meetings from eight other counties in the south of England, because we have found that all these counties invest their pension funds through an umbrella organisation called the Brunel Pension Partnership Limited.

For those interested in taking similar action there is more information available on Chilterns Area Meeting’s website at http://caqm.org.uk/news.

Tony Philpott
Chilterns Area Meeting

Trans privilege
The anonymous letter (25 October) was a masterclass in propaganda. What leads the author to their position opposing trans inclusion? Quaker virtue, they claim, ‘promptings of love and truth’, ‘sitting with uncertainty’.

What might prompt a trans ally? Wokeness, dismissed with scare quotes. They write of people’s concerns, but the trans woman’s is made abstract: she ‘feels alienated’. The fears of those who allegedly fear us are viscerally expressed.

I have worked to bring gender critical (their term for those who would exclude trans women from women’s spaces) Quakers together and have their voices heard. When allowed to speak to Norwich Quakers, I started with one of my experiences of sexual assault – not because that entitles me to be in women’s spaces but because sexual assault and coercion is quotidian, and asking for experiences opens a world of pain.

Just as some Quakers mask working-class status, gender stereotypes and oppression are everywhere unconsciously enforced, even in our Society. I sympathise with gender critical feminists because I see they fit the stereotypes as poorly as I do, and making my way of expressing gender nonconformity more difficult, chasing me from spaces I enter under the Equality
Act 2010, will do nothing for anyone oppressed by gender. One Friend's disgust at another's chest masculinisation surgery prevents her seeing the liberation the surgery gives.

Abigail Maxwell
Kettering Meeting, Northamptonshire

A spiritual place
In my mid-fourties I am of the modern age when demands push and pull from many directions. Luckily for me I found a quiet spiritual place in Quakerism at this time. Coming to Meeting gives me quiet, rest, release, humour and a time to give myself over to God to lead me into whatever the following week will bring.

I don’t always attend on a Sunday. Tiredness prevails and I opt for a lie-in and a quiet day to organise and prepare for the week ahead. I have chosen or have been led to a career that focuses on supporting people with health and social care needs. That is my ministry. It’s tiring, complex, demanding and at times rewarding. Family life can sometimes be similar.

Recently at Ipswich Meeting House recording clerk Paul Parker spoke about how some Quakers have challenges with fitting in with the Sunday morning Meeting slot for a variety of reasons. So true. But when I do have the energy to be at Meeting I feel comfort and solidarity around Friends and a realisation that I am home. Be good enough.

Cath Minchin
Ipswich Meeting, Suffolk

Inspiration then and now
When I read Mary Roslin’s letter (4 October), I thought this Friend speaks my mind, and then thought no more about it.

However, the response to the criticism of the advert for the head of local development (18 October) seemed more focused on the speculation about where the lack of mention of a faith-based organisation might lead us than the mere omission, and therefore came across as somewhat patronising. It made me want to study the ad carefully. Getting the right person for a job is not always the one who ticks all the boxes, and I hope the successful candidate saw and will be supplying the bigger picture.

I remember well a fellow member of Meeting for Sufferings turning the tide of thought (and expression) on a matter of ethical investment, where there had been an uncomfortable feeling but no one had spoken out.

The deep faith, passion and love of George Fox and early Friends were an inspiration then and now.

My previous Meeting lost the plot in an effort to be politically correct, causing unending sadness, and showed the same inflexibility and lack of love in outlook, as well as the secularity.

Keeping the advert short may be important and the omissions may well be covered at a later stage, but the world already has a notion that a twenty-first century Quaker may not have such a strong faith to hang on to, and it would be sad to foster this in something which is so much part of our reach.

Carol Holding
Diss Meeting, Norfolk

NC Wyeth illustrations
On page thirteen of the 11 October issue of the Friend is a reproduction of a picture from The Boy’s King Arthur. Regrettably no one has troubled to cite the name of the illustrator, who was NC Wyeth. The Wyeth family had an appreciation of Quakers, and NC Wyeth painted his wonderful masterpiece The Giant for the dining room of Westtown Friends’ School, not far from the Wyeth house, where it still hangs.

Arthur Kincaid
Cotthouse Meeting, Cambria

Dose of discernment
I think that a dose of Quaker discernment would have aided discussions of the relationships between the UK and our neighbours and would have elevated them to a higher plane (more spiritual, perhaps).

It is clear to me that the past four years or so have led to higher levels of division and hate crimes. A Dutch Friend, long married, working and resident in the UK, has returned to live in the Netherlands. I am sure that a contributory factor was racist graffiti painted on her house. Individuals and families (UK citizens on the continent and EU citizens in the UK) are left in limbo by the continuing uncertainty about their status and civil rights. Our fellow citizens in Northern Ireland may see an upsurge in sectarian violence. The present situation does not equate with peace and justice but is contrary to our testimonies.

Our discernment process is slow and patient and requires deep unity – as opposed to the present (I would say) chaos.

David Harries
Bridgend Meeting, Wales

The advantages of populism
I found Tony D’Souza’s article on populism (11 October) confusing. I like populist parties like the Scottish National Party who, of course, have done a wonderful job pushing windfarms and power lines past the serried ranks of nimbys, much to the benefit of all of us; never mind no student fees, electrifying railways, dual carriageway to Inverness, ‘free’ care homes, free home insulation, and so on.

Of the list of mass murderers, it seems to me that only Adolf Hitler was a populist, and this was a great benefit in the second world war as he took care that the standard of living for many Germans did not start to drop significantly until 1943 and they only then started to get their economy on a proper war footing. Too little too late. I think it unlikely that I (and many of your readers) would have existed if this had not been the case. I do, of course, agree that we should all hold close to our hearts ‘a sense of wonder’.

David Thornley
Address supplied
One in four of us will experience a mental health problem in any year. *Antonia Swinson* went to Quaker Life council to consider the subject

‘*We learned the role of humour as a weapon of the Spirit in achieving mental health.’*

Of the ninety Quakers who converged on Woodbrooke last month for the second 2019 Quaker Life Representative Council, I doubt I was alone in thinking that my Area Meeting should have found someone – anyone – better suited to the subject matter.

The very title, ‘Building Inclusive Quaker Communities – Mental Health’, seemed such a huge challenge to live adventurously.

Enormous thanks and praise must go to the Quaker Life staff team and the Quaker Life Central Committee. Crafting a conference on such a tricky topic is not easy with an audience who, in most cases, had no training in the subject matter. But thanks to the health warnings, careful timetabling – and clear permission to take time out if it all became too much – most of us negotiated the weekend successfully, and grew in faith. It was made clear that the weekend was about building inclusive Meetings, not one concerned primarily with personal growth. This discipline was crucial, especially when unguarded hurts from past and present could suddenly begin a chorus-line tap dance along the raw nerves of the psyche. There were times when we couldn’t help feeling each other’s pain as well as our own.

The real strength we found, of course, was in each other. What an extraordinary group of interesting, life-enhancing people, drawn from all over the UK. How inspiring to share the high and lows of everyone else’s Meetings, from Islay to Exeter.

I recommend that every Meeting should play the Quaker Life ‘Snakes and Ladders’ game. This involves writing on both snakes and ladders what makes us sad at our Meetings and what builds us up. We all pitched in and shared stories of pain and success and I discovered how lucky I am to attend such a grown-up happy Meeting.

There were three ‘Aha!’ moments.

Firstly, helping each other up with a tender hand at Meeting does not mean turning into Sunday morning social workers. Being Quakerly means actively listening and taking time to be interested in others’ lives and experience.

‘How are you?’ ‘How are you doing today?’ ‘Are you OK?’ Practice these sentences in a low voice in the mirror. Make eye contact and see how hard these questions are, even to ask oneself! How often do we ask these questions after Meeting and take the trouble to listen to the answers? Are we too often tempted to fix things instead? Of course, proper listening takes time and effort. Too easily we settle for the comfort of surface small talk, which comforts no one.

Secondly, it can be difficult to empathise with other people’s experience of mental illness or distress. How can we imagine others’ pain if we have never had a nervous breakdown, or suffered from coercive emotional abuse or bereavement, or come out as a lesbian and find the right words? Even if we have, how tempted are we to superimpose our own experience on the other person instead of listening to their truth?
We heard a remarkable ministry from a Quaker in her early sixties. Her bipolar, narcissistic ninety-something mother has dementia and is making her life a living hell. I found myself in the grip of an empathy breakdown. How could she and her long-suffering husband possibly tolerate that level of pain and aggravation? Surely no amount of daughterly love, or childhood memory, or inherited wealth is worth it? I felt the urge to yell 'Run!' Was I missing something?

Thirdly, we learned the role of humour as a weapon of the Spirit in achieving mental health. I hugely enjoyed the roleplay performed by a speaker with schizophrenia. She ruthlessly mimicked an insensitive consultant who looked for an easy label and a prescription to shut her up. We were also treated to stand-up comedy on Saturday evening, and a showing of Inside Out – the 2015 Oscar-winning animation where the characters of Joy, Fear, Disgust, Anger and Sadness vie for control in an eleven-year-old's head.

What does love require of us? Perhaps when it comes to mental health, it is less than we fear. In Meeting we ask in the silence for support to find our voice, and for the right words to clothe our thoughts. Mental distress is not mental illness and any of us can suffer at any time. We just need to feel safe at Meeting, and to ensure others feel safe too. It is as simple – and challenging – as that.

I want to give the last word to a wonderful speaker, who was written off as a child because of autism.

"The light is there even if you cannot see it. 'The light is there even if you cannot feel it. 'The light is there and loves you very deeply. 'No matter what.'

Antonia is from Kingston & Wandsworth Area Meeting.

Selected resources:

- ‘Mental Health in our Meetings’, a two-day course, Woodbrooke, 29 November–1 December (contact enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk)
- A day retreat for Quakers who work in mental health, Edgbaston Meeting house, 29 February 2020 (contact Alison Mitchell: mhdo@retreatyorkbfund.com)
- Mental health in our Meetings, a Quaker Life pamphlet available from Friends House
- Encounters with mental distress: Quaker stories, a booklet developed by the Quaker Life Network Mental Health cluster, available from Friends House
- The Retreat York Benevolent Fund gives grants to Quaker-led mental health projects (see http://retreatyorkbfund.com/Projects)
‘Sanity, Spirituality and Psychiatry’: Sheila Harvey takes part in a mental-health-awareness day run by Friends in Somerset

‘One of the clear messages was that there are no panaceas.’

The day was organised by Friends from the Mid, North and West Somerset Area Meetings. Alison Mitchell, the mental health development officer, gave us welcome support with the organisation and on the day itself. She is employed by The Retreat York Benevolent Fund, with a link to Meeting for Sufferings.

In the morning we ran two workshops, with each topic having two different facilitators (this kept the numbers to a manageable twelve to fifteen attendees). One considered the question ‘How do we support people in our Quaker Meetings?’ and the other addressed ‘Mental health in our wider community – a Quaker response?’ These were well received. I facilitated the first workshop, and it was interesting doing it twice, with different people. In the first group, as Friends introduced themselves, there was talk of healing; of long-term depression; of a particular interest in supporting those suffering from schizophrenia; and of caring for someone with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Members of the second group had suicide as their main concern.

Did we reach any helpful conclusions? Well, the most important thing we decided was, of course, to listen, and give a person our time. If we are worried that someone may be suicidal, it needs to be talked about openly. We acknowledged that we are not specialists and need to recognise when professional help is needed. Occasionally there is a therapist among us but they should be allowed to just be one of us, and not taken advantage of. Fortunately attitudes towards suicide have changed and are not as judgmental as they could be in the past (but one of the group had experienced this and it did not help).

One of the clear messages was that there are no panaceas, either in the professional world of psychiatry or in the Quaker world. But compassion and interested listening go a very long way.

In the afternoon session we heard a speaker. Quinton Deeley is a psychiatrist and neurologist with a wide academic background in anthropology and theology. After the customary glitch with technology we were treated to an impressive selection of slides, and a very competent talk. We covered the definitions of religion and spirituality, and the dependence on the cultural context. Quinton clearly takes a lot of trouble to understand his patients’ cultural origins. The secular approach to living, which we see every day, means that religious belief becomes optional. Other ideas in our contemporary life that are significant include: globalisation, individualism, rights, democracy and authoritarianism, scientific thought, naturalism and reductionism (the practice of analysing and describing a complex phenomenon in terms of its simple or fundamental constituents).

Psychiatry today is moving towards a respect for the patient’s autonomy: the importance of choice; the assumption of the patient’s capacity where possible;
respecting diversity and collaboration. There are, however, tensions between psychiatry and the religious/spiritual perspective. Reductionism tries to explain this approach away. Psychiatry is limited in its account of human life and focuses on ‘illness’. Psychiatrists are often from a different social and cultural background to their patients. Patients tend to explore lots of possible explanations for their problems and their ideas may conflict with both the law and the ‘duty of care’. Specific examples include brain injury, or a background of evangelical belief and religious delusions. So how much of a patient’s presentation is cultural?

Quinton talked a bit more about psychiatry and reductionism, and touched on Carl Jung’s conviction that our duty in life should be towards integrating the different aspects of our personality, a process which he described as individuation – very different from reductionism.

There is an acceptance that a belief system in any particular group is found in all societies and in all ages, but what about the ‘modern mind’? How do humans differ from the animals? It’s in the move away from stimulus-bound learning and social signalling towards language and mentalising (apparently accompanied by the descent of the thyroid gland – look it up!). So where does religious thought, as opposed to symbolic thought, come from? Fables and storytelling may be counter-intuitive but they are memorable and helpful in this connection.

The talk then turned to the relationship between psychosis and religious beliefs. Psychosis is characterised by delusions and hallucinations, with religious ideas frequently being incorporated into the psychosis. Delusions were defined as incorrect inferences which we cling to despite strong evidence to the contrary. These experiences have momentous personal significance for the patient. It is possible that the dopamine production in the brain is abnormal. ‘Apophenia’ is the word applied to the patient seeing a connection and meaningfulness where no one else does. Nothing happens by chance. It is often linked with artistic and scientific creativity, and the intensely personal feeling experienced here is also true of religion/spirituality.

Quinton is particularly interested in researching the difference between those who have psychotic symptoms and carry on functioning well in everyday life, compared with those who don’t.

Questions followed his talk. We could have had more of this, and linked our morning sessions with the afternoon experience more effectively.

With an attendance of around sixty the overall feeling was of a very useful and lively day. There is an appetite for further days and the experience of working together with other Area Meetings has been warmly welcomed.

Sheila is from West Somerset Area Meeting.
Love child: Tony D’Souza takes a fresh look at the parable of the prodigal

‘Going home takes many forms, but it comes down to finding yourself.’

It’s always the quiet ones isn’t it? Like that old bloke at the back of the Meeting house. The one with a wry smile and a twinkle in his eye. You wouldn’t think he could knock the skin off a rice pudding, but when he was young he was a right tearaway. Racing motorbikes around town, chasing girls, getting drunk and doing goodness knows what else. He was lucky he did not do a stretch in the big house. You know, the cons’ finishing school. You wouldn’t know it to look at him now. Looks like butter wouldn’t – well, you know what I mean. But that was all a long time ago, long before he came to this town.

Many of us go off the rails, and it’s not really our fault. It is just that we don’t know any better. When you are young it is easy to go the wrong way. Your instincts lie to you and lead you astray. You look for excitement and fun in the world of things – you know, sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll. You try really hard to find happiness in those things, but what you actually find is the law of diminishing returns. You need more of whatever it is, and the high is never the same as the last time.

Someday, you might get lucky. By that I mean you will keep on trying until it hurts too much to try anymore. Then you get to despair. Adrift in your own existence, you end up in a ‘far country.’ Penniless, broken in heart and in mind, and dressed in borrowed clothes – none of them clean. The despair really kicks in. Somehow, you manage to get a job. It’s not a job anyone would really want, but it’s a job just the same. Feeding pigs. And as a fine drizzle descends on a bleak winter’s day it soaks right through your thin clothes to your skin. And you feel so cold, so miserable and so hungry that even the pig swill looks appetising.

But this is really a great moment. This is the lowest moment of your life. It looks like things couldn’t get any worse (even though you suspect they will). But it’s also the greatest moment, because you have come to the end of yourself. You are sick of following your own way. You come to know, through bitter experience, that following your own way has got you nothing but humiliation, degradation and pain. And so, at that moment, you decide to go home. A servant in your father’s house eats better than this pig’s swill. So, you get up and decide to go home.

Going home takes many forms, but it comes down to finding yourself. Your own conscience, your own inner light. When you find that, you really have come home, because when you find it, you have a new principle to guide you, and a new boss. You see, before this moment you could not know yourself because you had no vantage point, no position from which you could observe your thoughts or the lies you told yourself. But when you find that point within you, the light of conscience, which is like an island in a sea of darkness, you are able to stand and look at yourself.

George Fox wrote about this. ‘The first step to Peace is to stand still in the light – the light that reveals whatever it is opposed to. And standing still there, you will receive the power and strength to resist that part of you which the light has exposed.’

The first time you see yourself as you truly are, it’s a bit of a shock. The self is a very unlovely thing to
look at, with its lusts, its fear and deceit, all topped off by touchiness, defensiveness, pride and anger. But don’t be frightened or put off. The self is all bluff and bluster. Trust me. Everyone goes through this stage. It’s called returning (or metanoia in Greek). George Fox experienced it too: ’But oh, then did I see my troubles, trials and tribulations more than ever I have done! As the Light appeared, all appeared that is out of the Light, darkness, death, temptations, the unrighteous, the ungodly; all was manifest and seen in the Light.’

The important thing is to stand in the light and observe your thoughts. When you do this, you start to change. To paraphrase Fox: ’Now this is the light that enlightens you: it shows you when you do wrong. And you know that when you have wronged someone or broken a promise or said something that isn’t true, there is something within you that rises up to bear witness against you. That is the light.’

That is the miracle of return. Day by day, bit by bit, more is brought to the light, and when it is brought to the light, it is transformed into the light. Every darkness in you is burned away by the light until eventually you become free. (You have to do this for yourself however – no one can do it for you.) After a while, the Life becomes established in you. This is what Christ meant when he said, ’I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness.’ When you find the Seed within you, it leads you in all truth and in your dealings with the world. It becomes a new centre of gravity in your personality, replacing the old one – the reckless and vainglorious self.

You finally approach your parents’ house. But they see you coming from miles away. They know it is you because they recognise your walk, your silhouette against the sky. And from all that distance away, the old guys start running out to meet you. Imagine that, eyes full of tears and out of breath, running up the path to meet you. It doesn’t matter a fig to them that you have spent all your inheritance money (your parents’ money) on harlots, gambling and whiskey. They do not mind that at all. They are not even thinking about it because they have forgotten it. They are just overjoyed to see you again, overjoyed that you have come home.

Even though you are dressed in rags and smell like something that has been dead for a fortnight, they throw their arms around you and kiss you. They call out to their staff: ’Get these filthy rags off… find the best robe to wear, and a diamond ring. Quickly, go and slaughter the fatted calf so we can have a celebration. Why? Because this is our child, who once was lost, but now is found. Why? Because this is our child, who once was dead, but now is alive again.’

And that is the true miracle, my friend. And that is the real point of this story. The love of God is endless, and God’s forgiveness is endless too. If you don’t believe me, go and ask that old bloke at the back of the Meeting house. You know the one.

Tony is from Finchley Meeting.
Bridgebuilding, by Alastair McKay

Review by Richard Seebohm

This book was launched at St Ethelburga’s in the City of London. The church was rebuilt from the ruined shell that was left after the Bishopsgate IRA bomb of 1993. As a centre for reconciliation it claims four striking values: crisis as an opportunity for change; spiritual values into action; collaborating across differences; and protecting the sacred. Each of these may give Quakers pause for thought.

Alastair McKay is an Anglican priest who learned conflict resolution as a Mennonite from John Paul Lederach, among others. His focus is on conflict within Christianity in the British Isles. Conflict may be more visible outside the churches, but inside their sanctified surroundings there may be plenty of ‘things we don’t want to talk about’.

Resolution has to be personal: know thyself and know the ‘other’. Troubled relationships almost always bring to light the presence and exercise of power. That power may be hierarchical but it may also be exercised by an accused who will not speak. The author spends time here mapping the personality characteristics that lead individuals into various sorts of role. With this in mind, you can turn to the issues in your particular situation. At first they may be unrecognised, latent. Once exposed you reach a stage of confrontation. If breakdown or even outright violence are to be avoided, you must find an entry point for negotiation. That may not work at first if there is a wider problem not yet faced. You must identify whose interests or concerns are at stake and where the real needs of all parties lie.

Then there is the role of the mediator. The mediator cannot afford to have a standpoint on the underlying issue. Getting everyone comfortable with silence (not so hard for Quakers) is a helpful tool. Beyond this is physical contact ‘laying on of hands’, or merely hand to hand (perhaps a bigger step for us). The mediator must recognise how group members are reacting, and how they might react if exposed to a different toolkit. But some deeper issues, arising, for example, from mental illness or law, may be beyond the competencies of the mediator.

The book is brought alive by its case studies. In Anglican situations the solution may be resolved by a person – or parson – finding some other environment in which to thrive. They also include instances when the author himself had to walk away. The obligation to love your enemy is then a journey to be taken, even if constructive relationships cannot be rebuilt. And mediation isn’t stress free. To let your life speak in this way is a privilege, but you need to pray for support and for personal peace. Try not to operate alone. The book has dialogue contributions by a range of religious leaders to whom Alastair has turned for support. He offers scripture-based backing for his chosen themes. His four ‘Friendly Style Profiles’ for personality analysis, drawn from Mennonite experience, were enough on their own for me.

Richard is from Oxford Meeting.

Richard is from Oxford Meeting.
Three high windows deliver
the movement of summer trees
and light on a central table,
water jug, vase, flowers, books.

I sit here involved in how long
it takes to mend things – reality
breaks in, telling other tales;
here pass from plot to poverty.

Our liturgy today a stomach rumbling,
a shuffle, exhalation, a cough;
we fidget, and swallow, decorating
this hideout with nothing but ourselves.

I scent the starved sentences
of a teacher taught teaching without ploys –
imagination’s a mind changing place
from a loss to a compensation.

Wordless, nevertheless, I turn my mind
to the plain vase gifted with peonies;
my eyes break on the water jug, pouring
tumblers of light unobserved.

Jonathan is from Totnes Meeting.
Deaths

Wendy BEST 21 October, Sister of Malcolm Elliott, attender at Ilminster Meeting, Aged 76. A Memorial Meeting to celebrate Wendy’s life will be held 3pm Sunday 1 December at the Arts Centre, Ilminster. Enquiries: malcolmelliott37@outlook.com

Memorial meetings

Peggy HEEKS A Memorial Meeting to celebrate Peggy’s life will take place at Oxford Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW at 2pm, Sunday 17 November followed by tea and refreshments. Enquiries: office@oxfordquakers.org or 01865 557373.

Meetings

MIDDAY WORSHIP IN THE CITY Bunhill Fields Meeting House, Banner St, London EC1, Wednesday 20 November and 3rd Wednesday of every month. Meeting for Worship 12.45-1.15pm followed by a light shared lunch. Visitors welcome.

Meeting up

YOUNG AT HEART FRIEND, fun loving widower (70+), looking for a like minded female companion. Living in rural Ireland, enjoys outdoor life. Interests include walking, gardening, swimming, travelling, music listening, ballet. Please reply to Box 997 c/o The Friend, 54a Main St, Cononley, Keighley BD20 8LL.

Diary

A DAY OF DETACHMENT - MEISTER ECKHART WITH REVD DR REBECCA STEPHENS Saturday 23 November, 10.30am-4pm. The Meditatio Centre, Islington EC1R 1XX. Details and booking: 020 7278 2070 or email meditatio@wccm.org

FINDING THE WAY A course on Meditation and Spiritual Growth. Begins Wednesday 6 November for 6 consecutive weeks, 6.30 - 9pm The Meditatio Centre, Islington EC1R 1XX. Details and booking: 020 7278 2070 or email meditatio@wccm.org

FROM DIVINE RIGHTS TO QUAKERISM Larry Walters, Quacks Books. Book Launch, Kendal FMH, 3pm Saturday 16 November. From barbarism to enlightenment, war to peace, Larry Walters weaves an exciting and informative history, showing how Quakerism was born from turmoil and conflict. Introduction: David Boulton, Readings: Lesley Seeger. Larry Walters will sign the first fifty books. Plus tea and cake! Order copies at £10 from Quacks Books, Petergate, York YO1 7HU. info@quacks.info

KURDISH PEOPLE IN SYRIA – WHAT'S HAPPENING AND WHY with Kurdish, Quaker and Anti-War Speakers. Public meeting Saturday 23 November, 4.30pm. Central Manchester FMH, Mount Street, M2 5NS. Free. Opportunity for networking afterwards. Enquiries: smosl@yahoo.co.uk / 07751 888391.

UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD New term-time Meeting for all Staff and Students. October – December: Simply Quiet and a Bite of Lunch. Tuesdays 12.25-1.10pm, Faith Centre. For some peace and refreshment, welcome! Contact: mail@wooldalequakers.org.uk or info@huddersfieldquakers.org.uk.

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Leicester Meeting
Resident Friend(s)

Leicester Meeting are seeking a Resident Friend/Friends to provide a welcoming presence to our community-oriented Meeting House, to keep the building secure and help with the smooth running of the Meeting House. Our Meeting House is busy, close to the city centre, but with outlook over a park and garden. A rent-free two bedroom flat within the Meeting House is also offered. Previous applicants are welcome to re-apply.

If interested, you are encouraged to have an informal talk with Fiona Cownie on 0116 270 1072 or email f.cownie@keele.ac.uk

Further details also available from Fiona. Closing date for applications is Friday 15 November 2019. We expect interviews to be on 22 November or soon after.

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