



STAFFORDSHIRE QUAKER

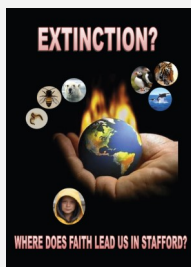


WINTER ISSUE, FEBRUARY 2023

TREES OF FAITH



Two Friends represent Stafford Meeting on Stafford & District Friends of Faith. At a pre-Covid gathering the group reflected on the ecological crisis. A book



let was produced, with members sending writings about the earth from their traditions. Some of its illustrations are shown here. As a symbol of commitment to caring for the earth, the group agreed to plant trees. Each was sponsored by a different faith.



On Sunday 20 November Rachel and I attended an event with Friends of Faith, Brownies, and other local people to plant six fruit trees. The Council agreed that we could use the corner of Charnley Park closest to Beaconside. Some of those attending live very close and offered to look after the trees.

"The tree that we planted with the help of two very

excited Brownies is a cooking apple tree and is on the far left of the site. We all got plastered in clay and due to the inclement weather, the trees definitely didn't need watering-in!"

"It was a nice occasion and raised the profile of Quakers while networking with like-minded people."

David Morgan,
Stafford Meeting

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said:

"Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit is rewarded"

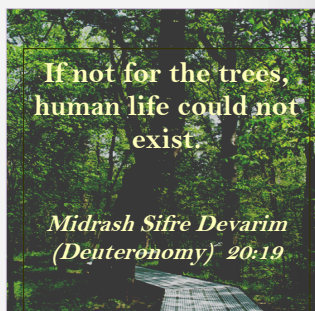
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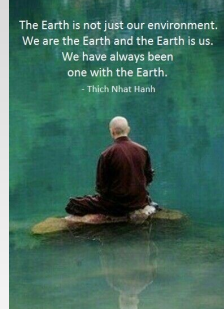
Islam

If not for the trees,
human life could not exist.

Midrash Sifre Devarim
(Deuteronomy) 20:19



Judaism



Buddhism

*Air is our teacher,
Water our father,
And the Great Earth our mother*

Guru Nanak

Sikhism



Bahai

AS ONE SIXTH OF THE HUMAN FAMILY, HINDUS CAN HAVE A TREMENDOUS IMPACT. WE CAN AND SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD...

HINDU DECLARATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE, 2009

Hinduism

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one... Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

FROM POPE FRANCIS' LAUDATO SI

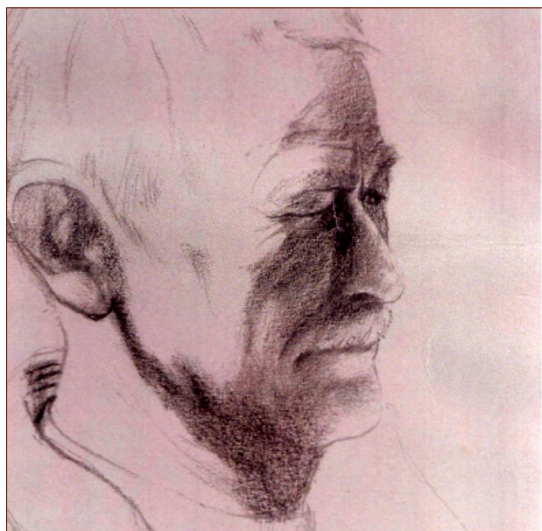
Christianity

BOB DEW, 1941-2022

Bob Dew, who had attended Stafford Meeting for about 25 years, died in October. Here is the funeral address by his son-in-law, Paul Cliff.

Robert William Dew was born in 1941 and grew up in Birmingham during the Second World War. He was almost universally known as Bob.

Despite coming from the engineering hotbed of Birmingham and despite initially working as a 'tank liner' at a motorbike factory it soon became clear that Bob's interests and talents lay in other, more artistic, directions.



Self-portrait

During his mid 20s he studied sign-writing and calligraphy at college and then found work creating posters and illustrations for a prestigious store in the city.

It was also around this time that he met Jane in a jazz pub near to the art college. Jazz and folk music remained a significant interest for the rest of his life.

In 1968 Bob and Jane mar-

ried and moved to Stafford. He then worked for the display branch of Lotus Shoes. I cannot tell you whether Bob's enduring love for a suede desert boot pre- or post-dates this employment. Given his love for folk music I suspect the former.

In Stafford Bob and Jane formed a wide circle of friends, and when Kate was born in 1976 many of these friends had children of a similar age that remain Kate's friends to this day.

The Dews shared a house with the Taylor family for a period of time. During this period he produced a beautifully illustrated short film based upon a poem by W.H. Auden, which was critically recognised in national awards.

In the family home in Doxey the attic was converted into a studio for Bob's expanding artistic interests. Bob went on to work for the Stafford Newsletter as an illustrator and became well known as a glass etcher and sign writer. There are numerous examples of his work around Stafford, including the striking 'Girl on the Moon' sign above the (sadly missed) Props Bar. Perhaps one day we shall see the Bob Dew Etching Trail promoted by the local authority.

Perhaps most unusually Bob is immortalised in a stained



Bob as a shoemaker in St Mary's Church

glass window at St Mary's Church in the centre of Stafford. He appears as a shoemaker. Personally I would have thought appearing as a shoe-wearing connoisseur would be more appropriate but I suspect this was an in-joke by David Gleeson, a long time friend of Bob, who created the window.

By the mid-'90s computer aided design began to replace the highly skilled techniques that Bob possessed and he chose to study fine art at Wolverhampton University. He produced some remarkable work, including self-portraits and images formed from dust.

His passions for art, music, style and companionship remained undiminished. Until the very end he continued to lead a life rich in his cultural interests and was a regular fixture at The Swan Hotel for breakfast.

He shall be greatly missed.

BOB DEW: A LONG REMEMBERED SUNDAY

A Stafford Meeting newsletter of 2000 contained a collection of memories of childhood experiences of church or Sunday school. Bob Dew's piece revealed something of his later character.

It must have been in the summer of '43 or '44. Imagine if you will a hot, limpid summer afternoon, the sky an azure blue. I was dressed in my Sunday best, clutching the hot but somewhat reluctant hand of my sister as we walked stoically (I would think now) past the roughs playing hopscotch and tipcat



Sketch by Bob showing him with his mother and sister

in the hot, empty streets of 'Greet', an industrial district in Birmingham with small-to medium-sized factories and back-to-back houses, ignoring the odd shout of 'Yagoo in ta Sunday School?' Followed by laughter, I clutched the hand tighter in mine as we walked on, all the time wishing that I could play as they did in the hot, dusty streets dressed in comfortable old clothes instead of this constricting itchiness of Sunday best.

The church of St Bede's was just around the corner on the Warwick Road, built around 1900, made of corrugated metal and painted in stark municipal green. One would walk up a sloping path past the main body of the church to reach the Sunday School, situated in an 'L' shape at the rear although joined to the main building. We stepped into the musty gloom to the sound of chairs being dragged into position across the splintery bare wooden boards, the walls wooden clad in herring-bone tongue and groove and painted at some distant time in gravy-brown varnish. Shafts of sunlight pierced the dust-laden air, but did little

to dissipate the sombre atmosphere of the room. My friend Richard clambered up to join me, on my window-seat perch. The service was taken by a Miss Stanley, whose youth was disguised by the 'sensible' two-piece serge 'costume' (it would now be called a business suit) and large-brimmed hat reminiscent of Baden-Powell. We all sang 'H.A.P.P.Y', which we both thought very soppy, and we giggled and made faces at one another, receiving several hard stares from Miss Stanley, who had very rigid ideas about how children should behave in the sanctity of God's church (poor lass), or anywhere.

The moment of rebellion was near - God had his head in his hands and Jesus gambolled in the sunshine. The strains of 'Jesus wants me for a sunbeam' were the clincher: a look of compliance and we were scrambling through the golden gate of an open window, gleefully cavorting on the welcoming grass. I feel we were acting out, in our childhood innocence, the very essence of the resurrection.

THE VERY
ESSENCE OF THE
RESURRECTION

BOB DEW: A CELEBRATION

A Meeting for Worship to celebrate Bob's life was held at Stafford Meeting House. Jane, his former wife, was amongst those who attended.

Jane had herself attended Meeting for a time. It was her piece of embroidery which marked the 250 anniversary of the building of the Meeting House.



CHRISTMAS 2022: NO 'SILENT NIGHT' BUT A NIGHT IN SILENCE

Stonehenge, Canterbury Cathedral, Holy Island, Fountains Abbey, Brick Lane Mosque ... and a small brick building with no facilities at all.

PART 1: CHRISTMAS

Christmas - a time of celebration for most, a time to mark Christ's birth for Christians. A time to spend lots of money and overindulge for maybe too many people.

I tend to have an alternative Christmas. I am not a great socialiser and can find the build up to December quite unsettling. This is partially historical from my personal background.

In the week prior to Christmas on my way to work I had seen huge queues of cars trying to get into Tesco's car park at 8.15 in the morning. It was even worse at 5 pm when I finished work. I take a short cut and cycle through the supermarket car park but that week there was gridlock in the car park despite the best efforts of Tesco staff, incongruously dressed in day-glo jackets, who were trying to direct traffic. Car horns were beeped, tempers were frayed and the queue backed up, blocking the road junction frustrating those workers trying to get home. One evening I left it until 9.20 pm to go to Marks and Spencer as I could not face

the crowds. It was relatively quiet and I talked to 2 young sales assistants who looked slightly frazzled after a long day on the shop floor (M&S were open 6 am to 11 pm). They told me about the shopper who earlier that day had bought £550 from the food hall. Only problem was that the credit card was declined. Ouch.

What has this got to do with that list of magnificent buildings listed above? Usually I have spent my Christmas days indulging myself. Not in a gluttonous, too much food way but indulging my passion for mountains. On previous Christmas days I have sought relatively remote places such as Bleaklow, Kinder Scout, Holme Moss or the middle of the Yorkshire Dales.

Recently, however, I have had a number of health issues which have restricted my mountain activities. For 2022 I was not sure where to go. I wanted to go somewhere with a spiritual background. I often go to Mow Cop, the birthplace of Primitive Methodism.

On Christmas Eve I got on my computer and did a search looking for spiritual places. I was led to a website. It was a sub-section of *A History of England in 100 Places*. The 'Faith and Belief' sections gives 10 sites judged to be important in the history of England (link below).

www.historicengland.org.uk/campaigns/100-places/fait-h-belief/#Section8Text

Ah, right, now we see the mention of Stonehenge and the other grandiose buildings. In that list there is Farfield Quaker Meeting Room. This is in Wharfedale near to Bolton Abbey. I decided to visit Farfield on Christmas Day.

PART 2: THE VISIT

Christmas Day - idealised view - the sun shines, the snow is white and crisp below a clear blue sky.

Reality - there is only one cloud in the sky. Unfortunately, it goes from horizon to horizon. It is grey, damp and minging.

I drove up a surprisingly busy M6 to Bolton Abbey in the hope of finding a parking space. Nope. Bolton Abbey, normally a very busy tourist spot with a massive car park, was shut. All parking places by Bolton Bridge were taken either as overflow to the nearby pub or by dog walkers.

Fortunately, Farfield Meeting room has parking spaces for 2 cars adjacent to the building. It was pouring with rain. I grabbed my jacket and walked around the building. A small, very simple building. I took photos as best I could in the overcast condi-

CAR HORNS
WERE BEEPED,
TEMPERS WERE
FRAYED

CHRISTMAS 2022 (CONTINUED)

tions. I felt gloomy. I peered inside and it was very dark. I could make out pews but very little else. The building is now owned by the Historic Chapels Trust. I tried the door and was surprised that it was open (in ironic contrast to the closed, commercial Bolton Abbey).

I sat at the back. I was hoping for some revelation or great insight. I was just cold. I sat a while longer.

Voices were heard. No, it was not a vision, it was 3 walkers coming in from the cold and damp. Ah well, better make conversation. I asked where they were from and if they knew of the historic importance of the building. I was slightly embarrassed as I found they were Friends from the Leeds/Roundhay meeting. They were out for a Christmas Day walk. They told me how to get to the Dales Way walk alongside the River Wharfe and wished me well and left to grant me silence.

I decided to drive east to Addingham so I could park and walk back along the riverside. The clouds started to disappear. I accessed the Dales Way on the south bank of the river Wharfe. The sun started to shine, the sky turned blue. The river was flowing and the birds were singing. The walk follows a simple path through fields and I could absorb the clean air, the soothing sounds of water flowing downstream

and the unconcerned nature of sheep grazing in the fields.

I walked back up to Farfield Meeting Room. Earlier in the day my mind had been full of thoughts. This time I sat down and gave thanks. What a beautiful day. What



a peaceful place. What a wonderful place to just be. Earlier I had hoped for some revelation as to which direction I should take in life. I realised that life will come to be and I will be guided as and when the time is right.

I felt refreshed and strolled back down the path and enjoyed the drive back home.

Farfield Meeting Room may seem a strange companion to Stonehenge, Canterbury Cathedral and other buildings on that list. It is, however, a seminal point in the spiritual journey of England. A mark in time for non-conformist beliefs.

It was 1689 when the building was first used as a meeting house. What a privilege it had been to sit in the same

place as many Friends had done before me and to enjoy the silence but also to listen to the voice within.

www.realyorkshireblog.com/post/farfield-quaker-meeting-house-one-of-historic-england-s-top-10-historic-faith-buildings

The list of the 10 places chosen in the 'Faith & Belief' section of *A History of England in 100 Places*.

- Stonehenge and its landscape
- Holy Island of Lindisfarne
- Brick Lane Mosque, Spitalfields
- St Andrew's Church, Ongar, Essex
- Canterbury Cathedral and St Martin's Church, Canterbury
- Jewish Cemetery, Penryn
- Lady's Well, near Holystone, Northumberland
- Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Smethwick
- Farfield Quaker Meeting House near Ilkley, West Yorkshire
- Fountains Abbey

Peter Ramsdale,
Stoke Meeting

WHAT A
BEAUTIFUL DAY.
WHAT A
PEACEFUL PLACE.
WHAT A
WONDERFUL
PLACE TO JUST
BE.

GLIMPSE

Beneath the willow boughs
 watchful waiting by water's edge
 tranquillity my mantle,
 cluster of bank side burrows opposite
 holds me transfixed.

Willing them to come alive with your shrill song,
 rapid wing beats, straight flight path
 low over lazy river flow,
 dipping dazzling flash at lightning speed,
 propelled from crumbling chambers
 flecked feathers rich electric blue
 or maybe sheen of oil-spill green,
 undercarriage burnt amber orange,
 plunging with precision for silvery sticklebacks.
 Your shy emergence I await with camera poised.



YOU PRECIOUS
 JEWEL OF A BIRD

From nowhere life-lustre arrow
 fires past, nanoseconds of brilliance
 shutter speed loses to your avian dexterity
 kingfisher, you precious jewel of a bird,
 spark of life to treasure, never capture.

Sandra Chambers,
 Stafford Meeting

THE OTHER

Nigel Peckett (Stafford Meeting)
reports writing this poem because
'I was and am angry at the way in
which one group of people treat oth-
er groups of people. The way in
which a group or groups of people
are demonised in order to treat them
or 'The Other' with contempt and
justify treating them as objects ra-
ther than human beings.'

I am not the other

I have the right to be

My very existence is of worth

I am not the other

They have no feelings

They feel no pain

They are sub-human

I am not the other

I have a great country

I have strong faith

My God is all powerful

I am not the other

They are beneath contempt

They spam like vermin

They have no right to exist

I am not the other

Woodbrooke, November 2022

SHEMA

During the Meeting for Worship which followed
Holocaust Remembrance Day Nigel read 'The Oth-
er' and then 'Shema'. The latter poem is by Holo-
caust survivor Primo Levi.

You who live secure

In your warm houses

Who return at evening to find

Hot food and friendly faces:



Primo Levi,
1919-1987

Consider whether this is a man,

Who labours in the mud

Who knows no peace

Who fights for a crust of bread

Who dies at a yes or a no.

Consider whether this is a woman,

Without hair or name

With no more strength to remember

Eyes empty and womb cold

As a frog in winter.

Consider that this has been:

I commend these words to you.

Engrave them on your hearts

When you are in your house, when you walk on your way,

When you go to bed, when you rise.

Repeat them to your children.

Or may your house crumble,

Disease render you powerless,

Your offspring avert their faces from you.

WHY DO I NEED TO OWN BOOKS?



On 23 January I read a *Guardian* article which appeared in the internet feed on my phone. It was all about books – one of my favourite subjects. The algorithms seemed to know me better than I know myself

This article bothered me. The title: *Reading is precious-which is why I've been giving away my books*. The author, Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett, was reflecting on why she owned so many books, what they said about how she viewed herself and whether she should do anything about it.

As a retreat from the world, I often escape into a book. Screen reading just doesn't satisfy the need. During lockdown, I savoured Cicero: *If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need*. I did so from the comfortable position of owning a garden. As regards the library, I was fortunate or so I thought by inheriting a large collection of books from my father. The size of the collection soon became an albatross. When we decided to move, I sold some books and donated others to charity. I did however still retain a large quantity. When looking at the bookcases in my new home, a strange sensation arose in me. At the time, it felt pleasant. Not now, in retrospect! The author of the article put that feeling into words and it is one that I am not proud of – smug pride!

I saw myself reflected back in the confessional words of the article writer. She said

that books had become part of her identity. So had they with me. I had to accept the unpalatable truth that I thought the ownership of books presented me to the world as well-read and intelligent! I was horrified at my delusion. Does it really matter what 'the world' thinks of me? Why should the ownership of books make me feel important? I am who I am. I am equally as significant or as insignificant as the next person. Are we not all made from star dust?

Her solution was simple:

- Keep books that you have not read and it is realistic that you will read.
- Keep books that you will realistically re-read.
- Give away the rest to people who actually want to read them.

I am still struggling with this advice despite its simplicity! I have decided to regularly review my books. Each time, it does become easier to give some away.

Next, I turned my mind to future reading. What about books that I would like to read but do not own? I thought another simple solution would be to visit my local library and borrow books. I visited Lichfield Library in search of a particular book. I discovered that I could not order the book I wanted because it was not available anywhere in the county! The very apologetic librarian told me that the purchasing power of the library was much reduced. She also informed me that

when the library had been located in its much larger building adjacent to the University that there had been an arrangement whereby more specialist books in the university collection could be loaned out to members of the public. Sadly, that is not the case now.

That led me to thinking that Local Meeting libraries are also very important and loaning of books through them should be encouraged. Although it is only a small step towards sustainability, it would be a move away from private ownership of books.

This issue, I believe, is relevant to Friends. Do you need to own property to personally feel secure? This is one of the discussion questions in issue 4 *Friends Quarterly* 2022. Here the property referred to is real property – land. I feel that a similar question can be asked about personal property. What do we need to own to feel secure about who we are?

I have tried to reword Cicero for the 21st Century: *If you have access to a garden and a library, you have everything you need*. That still doesn't quite do it as I ask myself - what about the basic needs of food, water and shelter that many people on this planet cannot satisfy? For those of us in the affluent global north beginning to redistribute our possessions and rethink the ownership of property must be a positive move forward.

Helen Buckroyd,
Lichfield Meeting

WHY SHOULD
THE OWNERSHIP
OF BOOKS MAKE
ME FEEL
IMPORTANT?



REACHING OUT: THE QUAKER SERVICE MEMORIAL

When the idea for a Quaker memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) first arose I doubt if anyone could have envisaged the final form of the memorial and its reception. Whilst originating as an idea from the Outreach Group it is difficult to estimate what effect the memorial has had since Staffordshire Quakers are not present that much of the time, though the Quaker Service Memorial Trust has received a variety of feedback (most, if not all of it, positive).

Those of us who served with QSMT feel blessed in many ways. The trustees always tried to do things properly, with the aim of producing a memorial that would be long lasting (hundreds of years!). We all felt the project was worthwhile but could not have expected the privilege we had of meeting so many WW2 survivors of the Friends Ambulance Unit and Friends Relief Service and their families. The strong support we received from Quakers and from the NMA itself helped us complete the project.

that the memorial itself is so imposing and that its design encourages people to walk inside and physically engage with the memorial. Meetings for worship held in the memorial are always moving. We have a fortunate location with maturing trees separating us from other nearby memorials. In the spring there are now an increasing number of snowdrops, originally planted by Quakers from Gloucestershire.

On a recent visit, QSMT trustees were delighted to discover that a cinder walkway has now been laid, running past and around the memorial. This walkway provides a pathway linking our Quaker memorial to some other large memorials and enabling easier access for buggies and wheelchairs. The walkway will also link a number of sites of a new arboricultural collection, enhancing biodiversity and bringing seasonal colour to the arboretum.



Now, in the 2020s, the NMA has strengthened its position as a place for national memorials. The Armed Services Memorial, which records the names of all those armed forces killed in action or by terrorists since the end of WW2, is the major armed forces memorial outside of London. Major memorials have been erected by the Police, the English Football Association and others and a large visitor centre is now in place.

The idea of having a memorial to conscientious objectors set amidst so many military memorials still seems radical. We hope that as visitors make their way along the memorial tracks they will see our Quaker memorial and stop and ask what is being commemorated. We hope that the words inscribed on the stones and information on the nearby plinth will provide a start in this understanding. It helps

A meeting for worship at the memorial is being planned for International Conscientious Objectors Day on 15 May. This will be the first organised worship at the memorial since the advent of covid. More details will be shared closer to the date and we hope that Friends will want to join us.

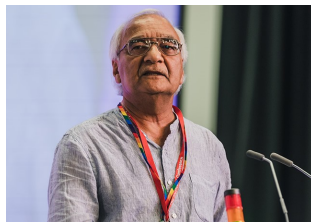
John Babb,
Wolverhampton Meeting

THE IDEA OF
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QUAKER LINKS WITH CHRISTIANS AND OTHER FAITH GROUPS

Stephen Petter (Wolverhampton Meeting) produced these reflections over a period of time.



Inderjit Bhogal

[1] I've taken on roles as Quaker representative to various organisations. I attended the Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary AGM, (and heard) speeches from the Lord Mayor and the founder of the CofS movement, Inderjit Bhogal.

Next day I attended CLASP, where I am Staffs AM representative. CLASP might more helpfully be called Churches Together in Staffordshire. A lot of enthusiastic community work is undertaken by Churches Together groups. Stafford CT are putting on a Passion Play over 2 days next Easter. Lichfield CT's activities kept being mentioned, as indeed were Biddulph's.

This evening I am to attend InterFaith Wolverhampton's AGM as my Local Meeting's representative. The meeting is at a Moslem Community Centre. I'm taking my Sikh friend for his first experience of inter-faith activity.

In these organisations I'm known as a Quaker. As such one gets respect. I consider it important that we maintain this reputation, gained by Friends acting under the guidance of the Spirit and taking seriously the example of Jesus. This fire in the belly of Quakerism needs to be nurtured by faith and respect for our religious roots.

But does our organisation support me in this? Am I a fraud when I claim to represent Staffordshire and Wolverhampton Quakers as

Christian or even as faith groups? Is our organisation still religious? Need it be? These are genuine questions. It would be helpful to receive some answers. BYM is keen on continuing to support Christian ecumenism. Are we?

[2] A week or two after I spoke (above) of my hesitations I caught an article from Friends House which discussed the importance of this work. I also wrote to Local Meeting Clerks. Leek Meeting gave a positive reply about liaison with CT in Leek. Stone had considered the matter in the 1990s and decided against. They sent a representative in 2015 but the link petered out. Wolverhampton said they have no links but are active in inter-faith relations. Stoke also said they had no links. Lichfield sent me a very positive account of their relationship with their local CT.

I was Bristol AM's rep to Bristol's CT organisation. I had a problem with their evangelistic style of worship and sought advice from the Quaker Committee for Christian and Inter-Faith Relations. I was told many Friends had the same difficulty. But it was impressed on me how important BYM/RSoF is in maintaining these links.

In the 1990s, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland reorganised, relaxed their constitution and extended their membership. Quakers had been very active in the former set-up (as) associate members, but that category no longer existed. CTBI was keen on Quakers taking full

membership. BYM had many discussions. The problem hinged on CTBI's Constitution, which specified a credal basis which Quakers could not accept. So CTBI amended their Constitution to enable BYM to join. At YM in Aberdeen we agreed to a 4-year trial. Then at YM in Aberystwyth we agreed to join. Many Friends were unhappy. However, as anticipated, Quakers have (since) played a significant role in Churches Together in England. A Quaker, Rowena Loverance, is Chair of its trustees, and another is one of the 4 vice-Presidents. She is making a stand against opposition to same-sex marriages. Many Local and Area meetings are active members of CT groups, often serving as Chairs and Treasurers. When Quakers apply to join there is often opposition from other church members, especially evangelicals. But if they refer to their national offices they are urged to admit us.

Church leaders welcome Quakers as active supporters and role models. My opinion is that Quakerism is indeed 'primitive Christianity revived'. We have eliminated hierarchical and ritualistic practices which grew up in the Catholic and later the Protestant churches. We work effectively on those issues which Jesus emphasised. Our testimonies are clearly based on His teachings and example. Leaders of main-stream churches recognise Quakerism's value and want us helping to run CT. We are 'God-centred, Spirit-led, humble learners in the school of Christ'.

IS OUR
ORGANISATION
STILL RELIGIOUS?
NEED IT BE?

QUAKER LIFE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

QLRC, held on 28-30 October, was to have been at Woodbrooke but it seems we have become wedded to Zoom. I attended as one of our Area Meeting's two representatives. Quaker Life is one of the departments based in Friends House in London. According to *Quaker Faith and Practice* its purpose is 'to help deepen experience of God's grace and its consequent expression in all our lives and our meetings..'

The theme was 'Putting Our Faith into Action'. We had presentations about successful projects undertaken by individual Friends or by Meetings. The keynote one was about Quaker Social Action which runs several projects in the east end of London. It was presented by their CEO, Judith Moran, who started by admitting



Judith Moran

she was not driven by faith. But what she had to say about her motivation, her attitudes, and the nature of the work she oversees was truly Quakerly. Her watchwords were 'Equity, Diversity and Inclusion'. Amongst QSA's projects was one to re-house homeless people, and one to teach cooking skills in which all ingredients were supplied free. Care was taken to meet participants' often desperate nourishment needs. She informed us that

QSA had taken over Quaker Homeless Action two years ago, and had ceased operating their Quaker Open Christmas project. She had advice for running a project, such as to ask WHY before WHAT before HOW. See <https://quakersocialaction.org.uk>

On the Saturday we had to choose one of four workshops. Most opted for Experiment with Light (EwL) but only 12 were able to do so. I was lucky to be one. EwL started 22 years ago when the Quaker theologian, Rex Ambler examined writings by the earliest Quakers and came to the conclusion he had discovered what motivated them. He called it Light and devised a meditation technique which was found to have profound, even life-changing effects. Now there are 'Light Groups' amongst Quakers in many parts of Britain, Europe and America. See <https://experiment-with-light.org.uk> or write to experimentwithlight@gmail.com. Three other workshops were on the spiritual inspiration involved in peaceful protest and civil disobedience such as at the Arms Fair, a project to produce a sculpture called 'The Pity of War' and the conversion of an old building for community use.

All the foregoing was very inspiring. Many participants had been coming often in the past to the conference. One said it was the best thing about being a Quaker.

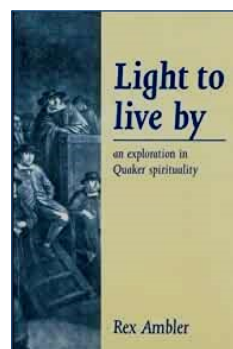
On the Saturday evening we had some light relief. I joined a Drama group. Led by a final-year drama student we enacted various roles and had impromptu conversations with each other, with hilarious effect. On Sunday we were told about the Local Development Workers who are being recruited for each region. Our region will include neighbouring Area Meetings and an appointment will have been announced by the time this report is published.

One of the participants apologised for leaving early, as she said her local meeting was studying 'Quaker Renewal' by Craig Barnett. Later I took down my copy and not only agreed with it again but realised that all our local meetings could benefit from studying it.

As for my reflections. First I would have thought most of the content to be more appropriate to a QPSW conference. *Quaker Faith and Practice* says the main areas for which QL is responsible include 'spiritual development, religious learning and pastoral care'. None of these was covered, except perhaps the EwL session. Secondly, only 6 of the 50 participants were men, and all the elders and convenors and the LDWs were women. Perhaps a justifiable reaction to the former dominance of our Society by elderly men?

Stephen Petter,
Wolverhampton Meeting

QUAKER LIFE
TO HELP DEEPEN
EXPERIENCE OF
GOD'S GRACE
AND ITS
CONSEQUENT
EXPRESSION IN
ALL OUR LIVES
AND OUR
MEETINGS



SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL: IT'S NOT SIMPLE

At Lichfield Area Meeting in December we were treated to a presentation on sustainable palm oil by Ken Wilson (son of Anthony Wilson) via zoom from their home in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo.

I won't try and reproduce the whole presentation here, but it was recorded, and a link can be found at the end of this report.

Ken explained that it's not simply a case of stopping producing palm oil as it's used in a great many products, from food to toothpaste and that it's currently extremely difficult to do without. Crops that could be used instead take 10 times the amount of land to produce the same amount of oil.

He explained that many farmers, especially smaller producers, often rely on this crop for a steady income. The round table on sustainable palm oil (rspo.org) work with small and large producers to help them grow the

palms in a way that works with the environment and animals as well as the local people.

Consumer pressure can help with this, a lot of the new rules that have been put in place are due to people (especially in western countries) now being more aware of the issues with palm oil



and so even big companies are working to make sure it is produced in an environmentally friendly way. The price of sustainably and non-sustainably produced palm oil is around the same so consumer pressure is helpful to get rules put in place.

The RSPO want to help to bring back the dignity to farming. They encourage

farmers to grow other crops, such as artisanal and traditional rice varieties. They train young people as rangers to work with locals and animals, and they encourage producers to leave refuge areas for wildlife, and not have a monocrop.

Ken also discussed the current worldwide environmental situation and how there is no easy fix, how current changes are causing massive problems for animals and people, especially in poor countries. He encourages us to not give up and to try and keep making changes, to think about what we consume and where it comes from.

I highly recommend you watch the whole presentation; Ken is an expert in this field and has lots of fascinating information from the front line of this complicated issue.

Gayle Yeomans,
Stafford Meeting

CROPS THAT
COULD BE USED
INSTEAD TAKE
10 TIMES THE
AMOUNT OF
LAND TO
PRODUCE THE
SAME AMOUNT
OF OIL

See: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5gkeK_zFJG45NY-

Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom

Francis Bacon

(sent by Peter Moore, Leek Meeting)

CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE: END OF MAY BUT PLEASE START NOW!

ARTICLES ARE USUALLY A MAXIMUM OF ABOUT 620 WORDS LONG — ONE PAGE

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