

News from the Centre

The Magazine of Central England Quakers
February 2021



centralenglandquakers.org.uk

A Message of Peace from children at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting

Sharing

Helping

Listening

Loving

Caring

Welcoming

Loving

Be kind

Take time

Smile

We are all inter-connected

Think before speaking

Love Yourself

“Ye have no time but this present time...”
George Fox

Remember it's not all about you

Let go of judgement

Small acts of kindness

Love those around you

Peace and goodwill to all men on earth

Try to understand

Think about others

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman
Bread for the Preacher, Dec. 2009

PEACE WITHIN

PEACE WITH OTHERS

PEACE IN OUR COUNTRY

PEACE IN THE WORLD

PEOPLE, PLACE

PRAY FOR DECISION MAKERS

POLITICAL PRISONERS

EVERYBODY EARTH ENVIRONMENT

ALL AGES ANTI-RACISM ALWAYS

COMMUNITY CARE FOR EACH OTHER CONTINUALLY

ECOLOGY EQUALITY ENERGY

Cotteridge Children's Meeting tree planting

Carolyn Arber reports on children at Cotteridge Meeting taking action for the environment.

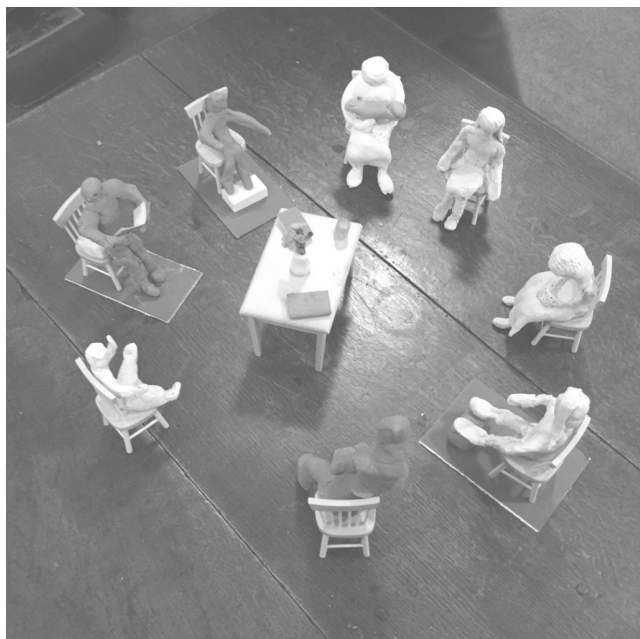
BBC Countryfile together with The Woodland Trust launched a two year project to Plant Britain. The target is to plant 750,000 trees in two years, one for every child starting school

in 2020. At Cotteridge Children's Meeting we planted seeds to begin our involvement in the project. We talked about the part trees play in the maintaining a balance in our environment when they absorb carbon dioxide during photosynthesis.

During the next two years we will discover more as well as find places to plant trees in the local area. We brought various seeds we

collected including acorns, horse chestnut, ash as well as seeds from fruits - apple, date, avocado and mango. We are also experimenting with fir cones. If any of our seeds germinate we will be able to plant them - but trees do take a long time to grow. The Countryfile programme on BBC 2 November 29th is well worth a catchup and the Plant Britain map is at plantbritain.co.uk

Planting a tree is the best thing we can do for our planet.



A sculpture of meeting for worship created by Rainbows children's group at Stourbridge Quaker Meeting.

Gathered in silence but surrounded by the harmonies of an eternal song

David Pulford from Selly Oak Meeting reflects on getting back in touch with Cape Town Quakers in a time of pandemic.

It was 25 years since I went to Cape Town to work at The Quaker Peace Centre and a long time since I had been in touch with anyone but on 27th September 2020 at 8.30 AM in the UK, 9.30 AM in South Africa, I took the plunge and joined their Zoom meeting for worship despite being a little hesitant. What if I didn't know or recognise anyone or they didn't remember me?

The screen flickered into life and familiar and unfamiliar faces began to log in from their homes. As I centred down I could dimly hear

my neighbour at home singing along to the radio and I remembered that the Cape Town Meeting House was opposite a Pentecostal Church from which the sound of the choir could sometimes be heard. In an instant I was back in that meeting house-re-filled with the energy and sense of purpose that had taken me there all those years ago. Back in the present we were gathered in silence but surrounded by the harmonies of an eternal song; The eternal song, The Word, The Light. I found myself ministering of its power to nourish, transform and support.

I now worship regularly with Cape Town Quakers and catching up with life in South Africa, learning about the impact of Covid, corruption, water shortages and load shedding. No, that's not a special diet for Weighty Friends but regular planned power cuts.

Christmas morning with Bournville Friends

For the first time this year, those who attended Bournville Meeting's Christmas Day lessons and carols on zoom could see the meeting house organ as well as hear it. Around 60 people on over 40 screens attended. Friends across the Area Meeting and their friends and families took part, some from other parts of the country and one or two from abroad. One participant from Southampton said afterwards it had been her first Quaker meeting!

Robin and Claire Bowman played and sang at the Meeting House with technical assistance from Nicholas

Tulley. Everyone else took part from their homes. Even though everyone had to mute themselves when they sang, it was generally agreed to be a spiritually moving and joyful event and there have been requests that it should be available on Zoom, as well as hopefully back in the Meeting House, next year.



Preparing for Christmas

Hilary Johnson will tell you that she loves Scripture. What's written in the Bible has a lot to teach us when we use it for contemplation and prayer. Towards the end of 2020 Hilary offered four Zoom sessions, based around the central Christmas story of a child born in a stable in Bethlehem. Using poetry and art she had selected Friends shared in small groups, their understanding of the meanings behind the words. After an introductory session explaining the process we focused on Mary and Joseph, Jesus and the Arrival of the Magi. Overall, 20 Friends took part, from a variety of meetings and the gratitude and praise for their experience is still coming in. Many new perspectives were arrived at, to do with the fundamental meanings of the story and there was praise for the relaxing atmosphere and fellowship of the sessions in such difficult times. Hilary is now working on her Easter story series—save a space in your diaries (see back page for dates and times).

The Hope Project: Work in Uganda 2020

John Lampen of Stourbridge Meeting provides an update on the work of the Hope Project in Uganda.

Benefitting from its past experience of Ebola, Uganda instituted one of the most stringent lockdowns in Africa, banning cars and public gatherings, shutting down shopping centres, places of worship, schools and entertainment centres, and instituting a night-time curfew. Most of the measures have been relaxed since June, although schools, bars, gyms and places of worship remained closed till recently and I think the curfew remains in place. Mask wearing was made compulsory in public spaces, while public transport operators were permitted to cut passenger numbers by half. So there have been only 16,536 cases in a population of around 42 million people, and just 150 deaths. Around half the total cases are listed as “recovered” the rest as “active”. There has been concern over the restrictions on civil liberties, and some instances of violent overreaction by security forces when the regulations were breached.

The Ibanda Literacy Schools had to close adult and children's classes. We decided to keep our teachers on full salary, as their modest pay is an essential part of family income. They have been coming in to work, maintaining the school gardens and mending and improving the buildings and equipment. As all our schools except one are built of wattle and mud, they need a lot of repair work after the rains each year. The six campuses are hoping to reopen when the annual long holiday ends in January.

It is election time again in Uganda. Some of you may remember that our other main partner, Rwenzori Peace Bridge of Reconciliation (RPBR) was very active in trying to prevent electoral misconduct and violence five years ago; they had a programme of voter education on radio and in the villages, and I was able to visit and join their monitoring teams on election days. They urgently needed to replace their aging vehicle, as some places can only be reached along very ill-kept tracks. We are hugely grateful to three of our donors who gave substantial extra help for them to buy a new one and plan their programme for the elections. This work is extremely important, as electoral fraud and violence are major problems. It also allows RPBR to re-establish itself in the public eye after a period of reduced activity.

Our founding Executive Director, Nelson Ndungo, has retired, though he still remains active in the programme. His successor is his daughter, Noerine Muhindo, who had been working for RPBR as Youth Officer. Nelson told me he discouraged Noerine from applying but the Board told her to apply, and decided she was the best candidate. I've known her since she was five years old, and I'm very happy that she was chosen.

Noerine writes that they have now begun a series of radio broadcasts on election issues and have also applied for local accreditation to the Electoral Commission to carry out voter education. Their Community Peace Monitors are being checked by the Criminal Investigation Department. Depending on the results they will train these monitors to educate the villagers on their rights and procedures. Last time some mischief-makers were telling voters, “If you want to vote for the governing

party, go on Wednesday [the official polling day]; if you are for the opposition go on Thursday" [when the stations were closed!] The covid-19 restrictions on public gatherings are still a hindrance to many normal activities. RPBR will report after the elections on what they achieved.

Julia and Judith, who introduced the re-usable sanitary pads programme for women and girls in 2018 (Sanpads), made a return visit last January to train trainers to carry the work forward. This work continues in some of the centres despite the lockdown.



We are in a good position financially. In September we sent around £5000 to RPBR to begin their Elections programme. More recently, we sent them a further £10,000 to buy their new vehicle and use the rest for the same programme. We plan to send a little more once we hear they have been accredited for the work. We were also given £2000 earmarked for two small community groups, run by two committed long-term friends of ours, which provide education and community development in their villages.

We send twice-yearly payments of £5000 to the Ibanda Literacy Schools for teachers' salaries. We have the money for the next one, due in December, and we can add a little extra so that the twenty-two staff members will each receive a Christmas bonus. Then we shall start to build up the next payment to the Schools. But we already have funds for some further support for RPBR activities next year outside the Elections programme and around £1800 towards a further Sanpads trip.

Those of you who give regularly may feel that the amount is small when measured against the sums sent to Uganda; but I assure you every pound is needed and well spent!

Educating for Peace in the Outdoors

Jackie Zammit from Peacemakers reflects on new ways of delivering their work with children.

During this tricky time we have been able to develop a new area of work. Peace Outdoors is a short course for primary children, which helps develop the skills and understanding needed to nurture Peace Within and explores how this can ripple out to Peace Between and Peace Throughout.

The key resource is a rope labyrinth. The ritual of walking a labyrinth is said to quiet the mind and bring feelings of peace and harmony. In December we braved the cold and piloted a few activities with a Year 4 class in Birmingham. The chance to run around and engage with the worms was welcomed before we entered the labyrinth.

Once we did, the children responded well. They said that it was calming, and fun. When asked to think of something that was on their minds to focus on as they entered the labyrinth, one child said, 'I thought about my mum and what I am going to get for her birthday', whilst others said, 'I'm thinking about dad because he is sad he has lost his job', and, 'I am thinking about my sister who is going to have a baby but is not eating enough'. Children were able to say what questions they think would be useful to place in the labyrinth, if they had a worry on their mind. This is what they came up with...

What are you thinking about?

What are you worried about?

How will you let your worry out?

Are you OK?

How are you feeling?

Who could you tell?

Where do you want to be?

Why are you thinking about it?

Who could you ask?

What can you do about it?

Our initial pilot has been encouraging and we look forward to trialling the course further, when we can.

Speaking Truth to Power

Chris Martin from Cotteridge Meeting reflects on working with Birmingham City Council.

Speaking truth to power is not just standing on the hilltops and shouting! Through working with the Birmingham Route to Zero climate emergency taskforce for the past 18 months, Chris Martin has discovered that engagement and patience can be rewarded. At a Full Meeting of Birmingham City Council on 12 January, the City's Route to Zero plan was adopted - more modest in ambition than hoped, but a step in the right direction in a diverse and unequal city being badly hit by the pandemic. The plan, however, contains some key amendments that Chris requested to the final draft plan. These related to building collaborative networks across the city, attracting finance from a wide range of sources and listening to and communicating with citizens. With these asks written into the plan, 'speaking truth to power' becomes holding the Council to account in these areas.

Another example is a question that Chris submitted to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Central Joint Committee annual public meeting. The innocuous sounding question was "What plans does LGPS Central have to invest funds into the West Midlands' Covid economic recovery and into helping Birmingham achieve a just transition to Net Zero Carbon?". Two months later a formal response was received that has opened the door to high level engagement with the pension funds involved. The question was one of a large number of questions that were coordinated by Pension Power Central, a group of local authority pensioners campaigning for the pension fund to divest from fossil fuels and tobacco, gambling and other shares.

In Chris's experience, one of the keys to effectively 'speaking truth to power' is for those who are able to work 'within the system' to share information with campaign and direct-action groups. With shared aims, carefully coordinated and well-informed action can be much more effective than an individual approach.

Ginnie Wollaston reports on building back better and a local incinerator campaign.

I am enjoying the Build Back Better campaign with Rebecca Woo from QPSW very much. Recent work on 'myth busting' gave me insights into our Tyseley Action - Refuse / Rethink / Recycle. My own personal insight of myth busting was that we managed to put our foot through the door about the renewal contract to Veolia regarding the Tyseley Incinerator - which previously had been resolutely shut to finding alternative solutions!

By walking with 12 people in September 2020 on behalf of 5 partner organisations from Birmingham Council House to the Tyseley Incinerator, we were able to attract support from a local BCC Councillor to our concerns - gather a petition of over 700 signatories and present this with cross-party Councillor support to the Full Birmingham City Council in December. This means that the concern will command further debate and investigation to consider a change of direction in renewing the contract to Veolia.



The Refuse—Rethink—Recycle walk takes a stop outside at Peace Hub

This revealed to me that by working with others - little old 'me' together with other activists could make something happen that might turn the tide on an incinerator that burns mixed rubbish and food and spews over 300,000 tons of CO2 into Birmingham air - raising our emissions and poisonous particulates - with no attempt to recycle or compost food waste. All because the city council thinks that a system that is in place and works cannot be changed and believes that residents do not know or care and cannot or will not recycle!

Hilary Johnson reflects on different kinds of truth.

Scientific truth is logical, maybe requiring experiments to prove a hypothesis. This is a 'smoking causes cancer' truth. If A therefore B characterises this kind of conceptual, rational thinking.

Historical truth refers to actual happenings. An example could be World War Two although different reporting of events and different interpretations in hindsight may lead us to think that this is inevitably a comparative truth – nevertheless this is a 'here is the news' truth.

The truth that concerns us as we engage with Scripture is narrative truth which requires us to engage our imaginations, a 'once upon a time' truth that demands our attention in a quite different way. Stories, novels and poetry absorb us and set us thinking along creative lines. They may require situational thinking that involves our own experiences and insights to help us with interpretation. Tales and legends engage all ages; hence they can be told to a child who may respond with wonder and curiosity. How many of us have had opportunities to explore these Bible stories from more mature perspectives than those we were offered as children?

Keeping alive the Quaker interest in botanical painting.

David Pulford considers bringing together nature and the arts.

For many years I attended the annual weekend course in botanical art at Woodbrooke. I need such courses to act as a focus otherwise I easily get out of practice, so after a long time

thinking about it, I enrolled for the Society of Botanical Artists Distance Learning Diploma Course which lasts for 27 months. It began on 1st January 2020.

Lockdown has encouraged me to get to know the parks and roadside

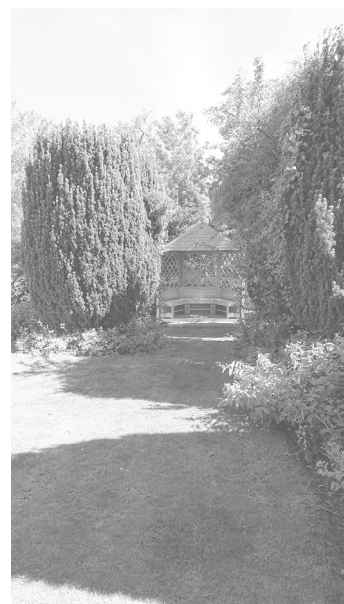


verges close to my home in a way I never had before, using an app on my phone to identify plants. What a delight to learn a roll-call of plant names that sound positively Shakespearian: Charlock, Amphibious Bistort, Bird's foot trefoil, Common Fumitory.

Interestingly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when Quakers avoided the visual arts, theatre, music and dancing botanical illustration was one form of art they could pursue as it was considered it was scientific as well as artistic and the study of science was a way of learning more about creation and the Creator. There were also a lot of Quaker botanists several of whom were leading figures in the field. At the moment I am still struggling to grasp the conventions of plant names but I am pleased to be following in a long Quaker tradition.

The New Warwick Meeting House Garden

Landscaping work on the Warwick Meeting house garden has been completed. There is a new wheel-chair friendly path from Castle Lane which is much easier than the High St access; a patio area outside the cafe; a play house for the children; an arbour for quiet conversations; and a raised bed for the children. Working parties have finished clearing and wildlife friendly re-planting. An open day had been planned for last summer but the pandemic made that impossible. Hopefully there will be a big celebration in 2021 when the garden will look more settled and everyone will be able to gather to admire it.



Poetry Corner

*Lonely and peevish, deeply lined
her face, a few hairs on her chin,
a scaly crust beneath her eyes;*

*there's little there, I think, to win
affection, little grace to see,
and all that I can be is kind.*

*Suddenly from the door there cries
a tiny voice: "Granny, it's me!"
Two glances one another find*

*and all the room is full of light
and all around the beauty shines —
the ugliness was only mine.*

John Lampen

Anna Baker writes:

I had Covid19 last spring. Fit as a flea one day and woke the next with fever, my teeth rattling in my head. Family cared for me and I soon recovered, but sleep, concentration and memory problems dragged on.

Now, following an unwelcome exercise in patience, I'm almost myself again, whatever that means. Frankly, I'm not too sure.

Post-Covid Blues

So. Are we done now?

Temperature? Down.

Blood pressure? Sort of.

Appetite's back.

Bambi legs stronger

and longing to stretch.

So. May I sleep now?

And stay asleep?

No ups and downs,

nor 2 am trips?

Another a wee wander

may just do the trick ...

4:25 now

Four hours till dawn.

Roll on the solstice

The nights are so long.

Try not to mind

when life doesn't rhyme.

This too will pass.

Gosh. It's 6:10

That's quite a win!

Time for a coffee yet?

Who won the Strictly?

Bill, you say - Oddy?

Oddly not Oddy ...

Another name gone.

So. Kettle's boiling

Sounds like a steam train

Bailey, it's Bailey.

Who's Bailey? Oh him!

If I look sideways

things often come.

Anna Baker

Notices & Dates for your Diary

A message from Barbara Groombridge, Convenor of CEQ Communications Committee:

I am delighted to offer this Newsletter to everyone and to wish you all well. We wanted to produce it at this point in the pandemic, to provide cheerful news and keep us all in touch.

It can be circulated to everyone on your Meeting's list, and printed out for Friends without internet access, and for outreach.

We hope to produce our next newsletter in April. If you have items for it, please send them to Claire Bowman: claire.s.bowman@gmail.com

Race and Privilege in Europe

"A remarkable session, moving, uncomfortable..." commented one Friend after the first of Bournville Meeting's "Race and Privilege in Europe" gatherings on January 13 at 10.30am. 19 Friends took part, sharing personal experiences of racial prejudice and white supremacy. The theme was Equality.

These worship-sharing zoom meetings will take place every second Wednesday of the month for six months based around the Quaker Council for European Affairs 2018 booklet "Race and Privilege in Europe".

Future sessions will be:

White Privilege; Socialisation—February 10

Unpalatable Truths—March 10

Racism in Europe—April 14

Our Place in Community—May 12

Justice—June 9

All are welcome to join any or all of the sessions - please email bournville@centralenglandquakers.org.uk to ask for an information pack, login details and instructions for downloading the Council for European Affairs booklet.

CEQ Climate Emergency Action

Thursday Zoom Gatherings

The next CEQ CEA Zoom Gathering will take place at 7.30 pm on Thursday 18 February on Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86559459195>

(Meeting ID: 865 5945 9195 You will be admitted from the waiting room)

*Thursday 18 Feb - **Build Back Better** led by CEQ CEA co-clerk *Chris Martin*. Quakers in Britain is one of the organisers of the Build Back Better campaign as part of the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. *Rebecca Woo* from Friends House will tell us about the campaign and we hope to have a Footsteps member to explain how Birmingham inner city communities are being hit by the pandemic.*

'Preparing for Easter' Discussions

Saturday 13th February 5.30pm – Shriven and Ashed

Saturday 27th February 5.30pm – Forty Days and Forty Nights

Saturday March 13th 5.30pm -Historical and Religious Significance of Holy Week

Saturday March 27th – Resurrection

All sessions will be on Zoom. Contact Claire Bowman for details.