

# News from the Centre

The Magazine of Central England Quakers  
April 2021

centralenglandquakers.org.uk



## “Let your life speak”



### A message from Children at Warwick Quaker Meeting

The young people at Warwick recently painted some stones with Quaker sayings for their new garden (see above).

*“Be honest with yourself first.”*

*“Come regularly to meeting for worship, even when you are angry, depressed, tired or spiritually cold.”*

*“Let your life speak.”*

*“Each one of us is precious, unique, a child of God.”*

## Lockdown Wedding Joy makes history at Bournville Quaker meeting house



On Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup> of April Rhiannon Grant of Bournville meeting and Piangfan Angela Naksukpaiboon married at Bournville FMH. Lockdown regulations meant that only 6 people were allowed in the meeting house but 105 guests on 79 screens joined the meeting from 12 countries and 7 US States on Zoom. Favourite cuddly toys were placed on seats which family and friends were prevented from using.

After the marriage vows there was much heartfelt ministry from family, employers and friends. Recorded music chosen by the couple, performed by their friend Junha and accompanied by photographs of their history together so far was played during the signing of the register and Quaker Certificate.

Piangfan has said how grateful she is that so many people in different time zones were willing to check their clocks and log on to take part. Some had to wake up at 5am and many were supported on screen by their cuddly toys in harmony with those in the meeting house. The dress code for those who wished was blue and white.



The happy couple hope to have a reception and party next year and will enjoy travelling far and wide to visit those who heard them make their promises, so that they can sign their Quaker Certificate. They are deeply grateful for all the support they have had from friends and family, especially Rhiannon's parents, in organising the occasion.

## New Meeting for Sufferings Interest Group gathers again

The new Central England Quaker Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) interest group met for the second time on the evening of Wednesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of April on Zoom. Friends shared opinions on current agenda items and gained insights into the workings of Britain Yearly Meeting between Yearly Meetings. MfS is the governing committee which carries forward the essential business of British Quakers in the gap between one Yearly Meeting and the next. The group will continue to gather close to the time of each meeting of Meeting for Sufferings, to discuss some of the most interesting items that are coming up.

Cathy Khurana from Sutton Coldfield local meeting, the Central England Quaker Meeting for Sufferings representative reported on the discernment she has experienced at its meetings and was interested in the wide variety of ideas and opinions which the interest group expressed

We began by considering the relationship between Area Meeting charities and the Yearly Meeting charity. British Quakerism is organised into around seventy area meetings, most of which are independent charities. Ireland has a separate Yearly Meeting. How do our Area Meetings interact with the national body, Britain Yearly Meeting of which we British Quakers are all part?

Most of the time was spent considering assisted dying, a subject which is being deeply thought about by a number of Area Meetings. Some of them have sent minutes about it to Meeting for Sufferings. The interest group thought that probably no firm conclusion would be arrived at by the forthcoming meeting as the issues are so complex.

The last topic to be considered was whether or not the terms "elder" and "overseer" are still appropriate to describe those Friends who serve for a while as spiritual and pastoral servants of our meetings or whether we should

move towards other terminology, which might sound less hierarchical. Once again, no firm conclusion could be reached but the various points of view were interesting.

A lively and invigorating evening was had by all. If you would like to join in any subsequent meetings of this group, and learn alongside other interested Friends more about what is going on with Quakerism at a national level, then please contact Cathy Khurana. Her contact details are in the membership book.

Meeting for Sufferings papers and minutes are available via [quaker.org.uk](http://quaker.org.uk)

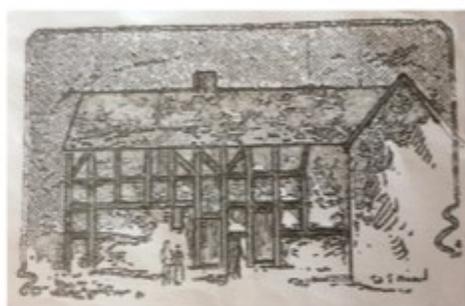
## Hartshill History

*Claire Barnett shares news of history uncovered near Hartshill Quaker Meeting:*



*The Fox family home c.1620-1673*

Hartshill Friends have been meeting over zoom over the last few months and are very much looking forward to meeting again in the meeting house garden soon. Over the last couple of years a local historian and friend of the meeting, Malcolm Lockett, has done extensive work in finding what he believes to be the exact location of George Fox's childhood home. He has been given support from Hartshill Friends in creating a booklet about his findings and he has given a talk to the meeting. We hope in time to be able to



*Sketch of the south aspect of the Fox family home c. 1893*

share more of Malcolm's very interesting work with the Area Meeting and this coincides nicely with beginning to turn our minds to the 400th anniversary of George Fox's birth in 2024.

## Quakers and the UN Climate Talks – How do we seize the moment?

*Claire Bowman highlights upcoming climate talks, to be hosted in the UK in November, and how Quakers can take action.*

Several Central England Quakers joined a regional zoom session put on by Quaker Peace and Social Witness on Thursday April 15<sup>th</sup> to learn more about COP26 (26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties) and the preparations for it, which are underway.

Olivia Hanks, QPSW Programme Manager for Economics and Sustainability explained that the talks in Glasgow in November will address what world powers can do to take forward their commitments to reduce climate change, made at the Paris conference in 2016.

QPSW has singled out two issues for UK Quakers to focus on. Should developed countries be able to 'pay to pollute'? Should there be a £100 billion climate change loss and damage fund to which all countries should contribute and if so how much should the UK commit to it?

The UK government has committed to reduce emissions. Are the policies and actions of our government consistent with achieving it? Quakers are calling for an end to fossil fuel subsidies and tax breaks for instance.

QPSW suggest actions you can take. There will be monthly spiritual preparation sessions online which you can attend. You can write to your MP or join in a postcard action in advance of the G7 summit in June, calling for a global loss and damage fund. You can also get together with other local churches who may be taking part in a relay to COP26.

Anyone taking action should email [OonaghR@quaker.org.uk](mailto:OonaghR@quaker.org.uk) with news of what is happening. QPSW staff are keen to know what Friends up and down the country will be doing.

If you would like to be involved in future CEQ activities on COP26, email [lowcarbon@centralenglandquakers.org.uk](mailto:lowcarbon@centralenglandquakers.org.uk)

## Conflict – Understanding and Responding

Wendy Burnett & David Sargeant reflect on a workshop on conflict, Led by Jackie Zammit from Peacemakers.

Elders and Overseers Support Group organised a workshop on ‘Conflict - Understanding & Responding’ held via video conferencing on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Conflict within meetings is often difficult to know how to deal with. This workshop was organised so that Friends could have some understanding of the issues involved and receive ways and tools for resolution which can be managed through the lens of peace.

Quakers are not very good at resolving their own conflicts and often don't like to upset people. Faith communities have high expectations and conflict within them can cause much concern. We need to know how these conflicts can be worked through and resolved.

To begin with, we were asked what we thought of as Peace. We thought: absence of war, living happily with respect for neighbours, harmony with any dissonance resolved, absence of noise.

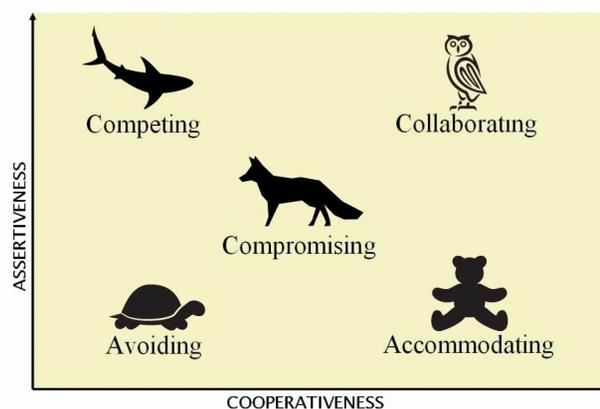
Jackie (the facilitator) shared a previous list from a women's group for comparison: peace is absence of isolation, hatred, disorder, shouting, fear, guns, war, racism, aggression. Peace is present in justice, safety, tea, compassion, listening, respect, patience, belonging.

We looked at and discussed the various ways in which we manage conflict to achieve positive peace, which includes the presence of other positive values, rather than negative peace which provides only short term resolutions and likened to building a wall.

When it comes to conflicts, are we:

- Sharks** – competitive, standing our ground
- Teddy Bears** – accommodating, giving in
- Turtles** – withdrawing, avoiding
- Fox** – compromising

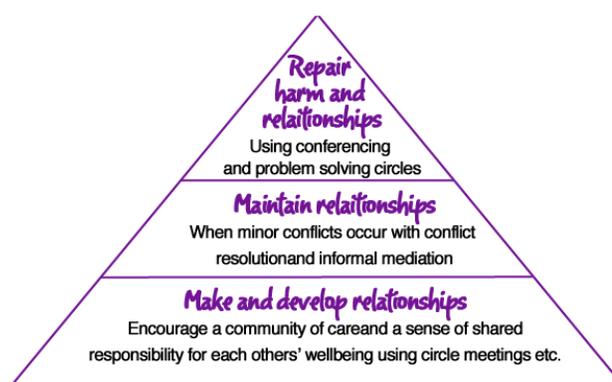
All these approaches have drawbacks. The better way is that of the **Owl** which involves **collaboration** but both sides have to agree to take the process forward. It needs courage and consideration to work through to win-win rather than win-lose



Conflict styles—description below left

Jackie also introduced the idea of **the conflict escalator** taking an issue up from the beginning, described as the Conflict Zone, through Different Goals, then Take a Stand, Blame Game, Loss of face, then finally Outburst. Like an escalator, once the conflict starts it can be very difficult to stop/get off. The best time to defuse the situation is at the “Different Goals” stage. The stress hormones which come into play with escalated conflict take a long time to leave the body, which is not helpful to one's wellbeing. Then, just because things calm down, it does not mean that the conflict has gone. It has only dissipated and is carried with us. We need to address our own feelings and the “elephant in the room”

**The triangle concept for conflict prevention** – the large base is building relationships within the community, the middle is maintaining those relationships and at the top (a bit like the tip of an iceberg) is conflict. If the underlying relationships are good, conflicts should be less frequent and easier to deal with. We need to continually build and maintain relationships in order to prevent and deal with conflict.



The triangle of conflict prevention—description above

- Issues and difficulties should be addressed early on before it becomes too much of a problem.
- Listening is an important skill. Both sides need to be heard in any situation.
- Listen carefully and acknowledge what is going on. Be curious and ask questions, don't let it go. Try to get in early if conflict arises. People need to want help in resolving conflict for it to be successful.
- Working with both parties in a restorative response to the situation is important. They should be invited to participate to repair the hurt.
- Our approach should be one of transforming conflict with humanity, repairing harm and nurturing healthy relationships.
- It is not a panacea and may not work. Cultural context and language are important.
- The use of a third party facilitator might well be useful.
- **Remember** - we do not see things as **they** are, we see things as **we** are.

Further information is available on the Peacemakers' website at [peacemakers.org.uk](http://peacemakers.org.uk)

The day provided valuable insights and ways of dealing with conflict which will prove very useful in our meetings.

## Build Back Better: New Economics Thinking

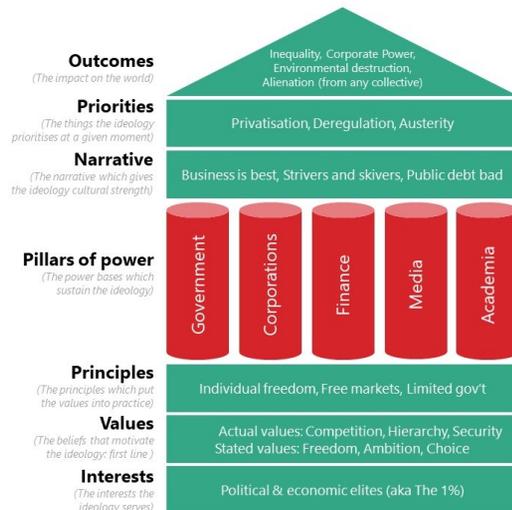
*Peace Hub coordinator Pete Doubtfire reports on a recent workshop with CEQ Climate Emergency Action (CEA):*

A small group of Central England Quakers recently explored the Build Back Better campaign, with a focus on New Economics thinking. Members of CEQ CEA joined a workshop to look at the 'House that Hayek Built'.

Build Back Better (BBB) is a national campaign aiming to use our recovery from the pandemic as an opportunity to make some of the positive social changes we want to see. So far the government has adopted the words, but not the principles. Quakers in Britain is a steering group member, and Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) have been supporting Friends to learn about the campaign and get involved.

Following on from an introduction to BBB by

QPSW's Rebecca Woo, this workshop looked at a tool created by another BBB steering group member New Economics Foundation (NEF). The House that Hayek Built is a tool to consider the structures of power that uphold our current system (named after the economist Friedrich Hayek).



### The House that Hayek Built— description below

This model includes:

*Interests: political & economic elites*

*Values: competition, hierarchy, security*

*Principles: individual freedom, free markets, limited government*

*Pillars of Power: government, corporations, finance, media, academia*

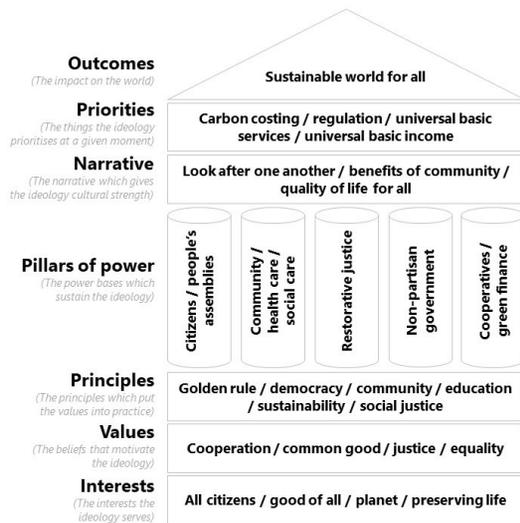
*Narrative: business is best, strivers & skivers*

*Priorities: privatisation, deregulation, austerity*

*Outcomes: inequality, environmental destruction, alienation*

Having considered the current system, this tool is helpful for thinking about what an alternative system might look like. As a movement we aim to transform the system at all levels, but as individuals and small groups it can be helpful to focus our energies on a particular level that matches our interests and skills. Often our attention is drawn to the upper levels, so there is much scope for new work focussing on building alternative values, principles and pillars of power.

CEQ CEA members spent time in small groups thinking about the alternative system that we would like to see, with a particular focus on the foundations. This exercise is intended as a starting point rather than an attempt to develop



### *An alternative vision—description below*

a comprehensive vision. Nevertheless, there were many shared ideas, and together a useful ‘first draft’ of a new system was drawn up.

Ideas included:

*Interests: all citizens & the planet*

*Values: cooperation, equality, justice*

*Principles: democracy, community, sustainability*

*Pillars of Power: citizen’s assemblies, community, health & social care, restorative justice, non-partisan government, cooperatives & green finance*

*Narratives: care for one another, benefits of community*

*Priorities: regulation, carbon costing, universal basic income & services*

*Outcomes: a sustainable world for all*

The next stage is to consider what areas we might want to focus on, either as a group or as individuals.

If you would like to run this activity with your Quaker Meeting, please email [office@peacehub.org.uk](mailto:office@peacehub.org.uk)

If you would like to be involved in future CEQ CEA activities, including on new economics thinking and Build Back Better, email [lowcarbon@centralenglandquakers.org.uk](mailto:lowcarbon@centralenglandquakers.org.uk)

## Poetry Corner

### Strange Times

*From Lockdown  
He came forth  
To mind us*

*Remind us that  
We are LIGHT!*

*Our light burned  
For one another  
in this dark  
unpredictable time*

*Rejoice now!  
Be glad!  
we have indeed  
Loved one Another.*

Mary Agnes Moore

### An Everyday Habit

*I am **Silence!***

*I have always existed  
Present each day.*

*I want you to spend time with me  
Try me out!*

*Science now knows how worthwhile I am,  
Your body Your mind Your spirit crave my  
company.*

*It may be a brief time it may be longer.*

***Trust me  
Rely on me  
Depend on me***

*I will bring you many **Gifts***

*You will **CHANGE!***

Mary Agnes Moore

### ‘News from the Centre’?

This newsletter needs a new name - can you suggest one? We are looking for a title that reflects its content from all parts of our Area Meeting, not just the Birmingham "centre".

Let us know what you think: [website@centralenglandquakers.org.uk](mailto:website@centralenglandquakers.org.uk)

This is your Newsletter!

## The hard days

"Stay home" they said.  
"Don't work" they said.  
"Isolate"  
"Protect"  
"Save lives" they said.  
"Don't meet"  
"Don't touch"  
"Just don't!" they said.

"Clap!" they said,  
"For the doctors"  
"For the nurses"  
"Clap!"  
"8pm, Thursday"  
"Sharp"  
"And don't be late!" they said.  
(Be sure the neighbours see!)

No shops but food.  
No pubs.  
No cinemas.  
Cafés,  
Theatres,  
Gyms,  
All closed  
Until they say.

....  
This breath you hear... no, not the breeze that  
stirs the leaves,  
The sigh that escapes my lips, my tired mind,  
weary of words.  
So many words.

....  
And so my feet lead me into the quiet lane.  
Past dozing cottages, their gardens basking in  
the glow  
Of so much loving care.  
On between tall hedgerows ripe with promise I  
climb.  
(Burning muscles chide for leaving it so long!)  
A hidden chiffchaff loudly calls encouragement,  
persuades me on  
Past snowy elder, addersmeat, red campion  
And vivid flame of cuckoo pint among the  
green.

The hedgerow dips and off to the east I watch  
the farmer on his tractor  
Comb tidy his field while a clamour of gulls  
whirl in his wake.  
Their cries fly in an instant the half-mile of  
bright morning.  
They know nothing of our concerns  
And why would they?  
The winds still blow, the sun lights the sky, fish  
still swim in the blue-grey seas.  
"Learn from us," they cry. "Learn from us!"

Over the stile now and through the lush green  
meadow,  
My steps enlivened by sudden flight of  
butterflies and tiny moths,  
Wild flowers the haunt of hoverflies and bees.  
A moment more and the herd regard me with a  
solemn gaze  
And I pause to consult the wisdom of a cow.  
We share the sun's warmth and she patiently  
explains the world to me:  
The scents that carry on the breeze.  
The exquisite sweetness of wild flowers and  
grass.  
"What else matters?" she asks. "What else  
really matters?"  
She's right, of course and I thank her for it.

On the hillside below me  
The sheep are gathered, grazing silently.  
I knew they'd be there.  
The sweet scent of them came to me along the  
hedgerow  
And I was glad.  
Their smiles speak of contentment,  
Their simple, easy commitment to grass and  
herb.  
Perhaps they wonder why I rest at the gate  
and watch.  
I think they know.

.....  
Gulls and cows and sheep are honest!  
I'll take home with me their simple truths  
And remember them on the hard days!

Les Derbyshire

Les is a member of Dorset and South Wiltshire  
Area Meeting who has been Worshipping with  
Bournville Friends on Zoom during lockdown.  
He has been a regular Friend in Residence at  
Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre.



A quiet  
seat in  
Kings  
Heath  
Meeting  
House  
garden

# Notices & Dates for your Diary

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

I would like to wish all of you well and to thank everyone who has contributed to this Newsletter. Please, if you haven't contributed yet, think about doing so! You may have a poem, artwork, photo or item that you would like to share. If so, send it to Claire Bowman, our current editor, at [claire.s.bowman@gmail.com](mailto:claire.s.bowman@gmail.com) If you know people in your Meeting with particular talents, tell them about the Newsletter and encourage them to submit something. We need variety!

## Approaching the Bible: Summer Series

Following Preparing for Christmas and Preparing for Easter the Summer Series of Bible study sessions on Zoom will cover broad introductions to two key themes from the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) and two major areas of Jesus' ministry – miracles and parables from the New Testament. Each session will then focus on a particular story for discussion with some use of poetry and art where appropriate material is available.

For details of the Zoom link, please contact Claire Bowman on [claire.s.bowman@gmail.com](mailto:claire.s.bowman@gmail.com)

Saturday April 24<sup>th</sup> 5.30 – 7 pm

Introduction: An overview of Genesis  
Focus on Genesis 1: the creation story

Saturday May 8<sup>th</sup> 5.30 – 7 pm

Introduction: An overview of Exodus  
Focus on the midwives + Pharaoh's daughter

Saturday May 22<sup>nd</sup> 5.30 – 7 pm

Introduction: Finding Meaning in the Miracles  
Focus on The Feeding of the 5,000

Saturday June 5<sup>th</sup> 5.30 – 7 pm

Introduction: Parables – Short stories by Jesus  
Focus on The Prodigal Son

## New Book on the Friends Ambulance Unit

*A new book on the wartime correspondence of Quakers Ralph and Joan Barlow, Edited by Antony Barlow.*

### **An Exacting Mistress: The Friends Ambulance Unit in the Second World War**

As we reach the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the year my father joined The Friends Ambulance Unit, it is perhaps an appropriate moment to take another look at this remarkable voluntary organization, comprised of people from many different backgrounds, all of whom joined to make a difference.

This book attempts to tell the personal story of one of these, my father, through the many letters my parents' wrote to each other, while my father was serving abroad in the Middle East, East Africa, India and China, telling of their own struggles, either with depression, or separation or bringing up two children in war-torn Britain. In one of his letters he called the FAU 'An Exacting Mistress', which I have taken as a title.

'An Exacting Mistress' published by Quacks Books at the end March 2021 at £20.

Available to Friends at £15.00 +p&p. Please contact Antony Barlow

[artspublicity@hotmail.com](mailto:artspublicity@hotmail.com)

Bournville Local Meeting is hosting two more **Race and Privilege in Europe** meetings:

12th May—'Our Place in Community' and 9th June—'Justice'.

Each session starts at 10.30am and lasts for one hour.

More details from [bournville@centralenglandquakers.org.uk](mailto:bournville@centralenglandquakers.org.uk)

**Central England Quakers Communications Committee 2021.**

**This edition edited by Claire Bowman**