



# Roundabout Central England



The newsletter of Central England Quakers - July 2022  
centralenglandquakers.org.uk

## Breeding Grounds



### Breeding Grounds with Journeymen Theatre

*Fran Wilde reports on the latest (and final) production from Journeymen Theatre:*

**Stuffication:** an over-accumulation of things as the result of an acquisitive life style.

**Snuffocation:** the need for our society to uphold the futures of the young and to cease inhumanely perpetuating the lives of the old.

Lynn and Dave Morris of Stourbridge Meeting, aka Journeymen Theatre, have a fascinating 12 year track record of examining societal issues, identified by Quakers. The hallmarks of their two-hander plays are extensive research, experiential authenticity, cracking good scripts and mesmerising acting. Their followers will be sad to know that they have decided that Breeding Grounds is the last play that they will produce and perform.

Breeding Grounds was commissioned by Quaker Concern Over Population, who seek to open up discussion on world population. Not only has the world population risen exponentially to nearly 8 billion, but the balance of species has changed. 10,000 years ago humans comprised 1% of animal species. Now 1% is wild animals, 32% is humans, and 67% is livestock to feed humans. QCOP's website says that "the level of pollution resulting from our numbers and our consumption is already a danger to life, both to us and to such of wildlife as survives."

Lynn and Dave say that the commission has been one of their most challenging.

**There are issues of 'otherness', inbuilt racism and eco-fascism associated with mainstream discussion on population control, sharpened by climate and ecological disaster.**

One of the mantras of Journeymen Theatre is, "We are all part of the problem; we are all part of the solution; we don't offer any answers." Whilst researching Lynn and Dave have considered the population dynamics here in the UK, and what lies behind them. They ask the question, Where are our responsibilities, personally, locally and nationally, in ensuring a sustainable future for our world?

Stewart, a politician up for re-election, and his wife Ingrid, a community health worker and climate activist, help us to consider the breadth of our own population problems and the effects we have on far-off ecologies. They tread where vote-seeking politicians dare not, talk stuffification and snuffocation, and tussle over our consumption as being of equal consideration to population numbers. They demonstrate that many of the Quaker concerns that Journeymen Theatre have already explored, such as the status of refugees (The Bundle) and the eradication of poverty (Red Flag over Bermondsey), are right there in the ecological mix.

Breeding Grounds is getting heavily booked to the end of 2022. It will be touring during 2023 with another thought-provoker, Backdoor Parole. Further information on how to book Journeymen for a venue you know, and where they are performing, is available at [www.journeymentheatre.com](http://www.journeymentheatre.com)

## Coventry Film Club

*Pete Duckworth reports on a new regular film night at Coventry meeting.*

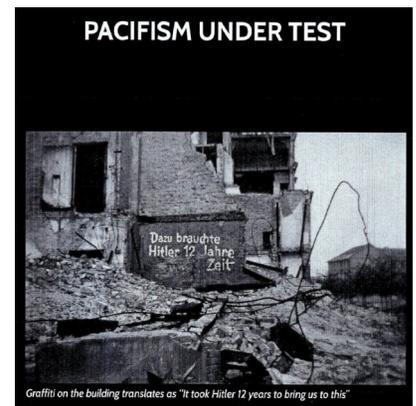
Our film nights grew as an initiative from Coventry Quakers pastoral Care Group. It makes use of our huge 43" TV which we installed to enable Blended Meeting For Worship. We meet monthly, now on Thursdays and like to choose films that may be of interest as Quakers. So far we've watched:

Dogma, a 1999 cult movie with Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Alan Rickman and remarkably the singer Alanis Morissette as God;

ET, the 1982 classic (featuring a very young Drew Barrymore), a feel-good Sci Fi Fantasy with a subtle allegory. This screening got a mention on BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme;

Monty Python's Life of Brian, the 1979 genius comedy;

Pacifism Under Test. This presents personal responses and reflections of some of those who served in the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) and the Friends Relief Service (FRS).



Our next showing will be on Thursday 8th September and we're planning to watch Billy Connolly and Judy Davis in The Man Who Sued God.

**Don't think of this as a screening in your local multiplex! We're just a few Friends watching a DVD companionably and then sharing our varied reactions.**

Please come along, see what's on offer and do make your own suggestions as to what we might watch over the following months. Friends from other Meetings and non-Quakers are particularly welcome.

## A Walk to Wonderland

*In this guest article, Toqueer Ahmed Quyyam, a Muslim who has connected with Central England Quakers via Footsteps (Faiths for a Low Carbon Future) shares his experience of connecting with the UK countryside.*

As a child I had a dream of beautiful hill tops, wind blowing in my hair, the serenity of the countryside. It felt like heaven. So I was excited to find out that Birmingham Climate Justice Coalition were organising a trip to mark the 90th anniversary of the first trespass into the Peak District.

*On a beautiful day it was amazing to see so many diverse people attend, young and old, many of whom would, like me, be visiting the Peak District for the first time.*

We were welcomed by local people with homemade cakes of every kind and hot drinks too. The vicar from the local church told me interesting stories of the history of the area. Did you know that the Normans once lived there? And that the parish churches, dating back centuries, to this day are centres for the community?

I got ready and off we went. "Here we go", I shouted out, heard by the birds, enjoying the vastness of the blue sky. As we walked, I saw a gushing spring and beautiful trees. The mountains were breathtaking. I just stood there, stunned. My dream, I thought, came true. There really is a place called heaven and it's in the Peak District at a town called Edale.

Walking up the mountain was tough, but enjoyable. I borrowed a camera and took lots of photos to document my trip to inspire many more from minorities to connect with the countryside.



View from Kinder Scout

As a climate activist, I feel we need to believe in the dream we have of a better, fairer and greener world and work hard to get there. The countryside is great for this as it's a place of peace, reflection and conversation.

We reached the top of the summit after about 2 hours and the view from the top was stunning. I rested and embraced what nature has always given us. The love and compassion could surely be felt.

What a fantastic day, a memory I shall cherish forever. It made us all appreciate the value of the countryside and the conversations we had on the day. We decided we needed a local Kinder in Colour group so that many more people, especially minorities could access all this. I will be part of that working group and after this adventure, there will many more to come.

To find out more please visit [footstepsbcf.org.uk/2022/05/05/a-walk-to-wonderland-kinder-in-colour/](https://footstepsbcf.org.uk/2022/05/05/a-walk-to-wonderland-kinder-in-colour/)



Toqueer recounts his experience at our Peace Hub

## Hello from our new Principal Officer

*Sarah Barker, our new Principal Officer for Central England Quakers, is now in post and sends a message to Friends.*

It was lovely to meet some of you at Woodbrooke during the AM Away Day on 21<sup>st</sup> May and hear about your reflections on the Area Meeting and hopes for the future and I thank you for the warm welcome. I 'officially' started in post on 27<sup>th</sup> June and spent some time in the first couple of days at the office in the Priory Rooms with Judith Jenner (Clerk to Trustees) and Stacy Sheekey (CEQ Office Administrator) sorting out IT access and doing a lot of reading! Over the coming weeks I look forward to meeting with more of you. If you wish to contact me, please feel free to do so via email on [sarah.barker@ceaqm.org.uk](mailto:sarah.barker@ceaqm.org.uk) or the CEQ office 0121 2362644.

# Faith in Action

## Responses to refugees: our racism exposed

*Barbara Forbes reflects on the contrasting responses to refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere in the world, and what this says about us.*

It is heart-warming to observe the enthusiasm across the country to support and welcome those fleeing the war in Ukraine! And yet many have been pointing out that the disparity between the responses to refugees from Ukraine and refugees from elsewhere has revealed racism both in the government and the wider public.

Media coverage of the refugees from Ukraine markedly contrasts with headlines condemning those asylum-seekers who have hitherto been “swamping” the country. There is blatant racism for example, in the treatment of Black students trying to flee from Ukraine; there have also been reports of Roma families being prevented from leaving.

More than 150,000 people have expressed interest in taking in Ukrainians – but seven months after the fall of Kabul, less than 450 have offered space for Afghan refugees. Media have reported that people feel drawn to support Ukrainians because “they look like us”; “they are Europeans” – (statements made by people who have failed to notice that Britain is a multi-racial and plural society): and Sabir Zazai, CEO of the Scottish Refugee Council, attended a meeting where someone said that refugees from Ukraine would bring “better human capital”. Better than what?

Our governments have, over decades, gaslighted the British public into believing that asylum seekers are a threat. Proposals in the Nationality and Borders Bill reveal the cruel and callous nature of the government’s thinking. Religious groups, human rights groups, schools, colleges, arts groups and individuals – have been campaigning to replace the hostile environment with something hospitable and welcoming, often in the face of indifference and active hostility.

*The natural human reaction to want to “do something” when confronted with horror and atrocities is only triggered at specific times.*

When the photo of Alan Kurdi’s body was washed up on a beach in Turkey, there was an outpouring of emotion which quickly died down. Was it just sentimentality – as Oscar Wilde said, having the luxury of an emotion without paying for it? With the tragedy in Ukraine the images are before us all the time, their brave and bold president is masterful in his leadership, and of course people will want to help. But often these offers are made without any real knowledge or understanding of what might be involved or what the consequences might be.

Meanwhile, in Yemen (which has been consistently bombed for over seven years with UK bombs dropped by UK-trained pilots), Afghanistan (where five million children face starvation and where people are actually selling their children), Syria (where the war has been going on for eleven years), Ethiopia (where the war with Tigray has been re-ignited), and in many more countries, people are wondering why their humanitarian catastrophe is not important enough to produce such headlines and offers of welcome. The UK is genuinely “world-beating” when it comes to turning away people fleeing from those wars. Will this welcome for Ukrainians make people more sensitive to the needs of asylum-seekers from other countries too, and open people’s eyes to the horrors of the UK asylum system?

The churches, including Quakers, have an important opportunity here to change how we think and speak about asylum-seekers, and many congregations are already doing this. As the government continues its descent into the bottomless pit of its inhumanity, the churches have to make a loud and clear call for good against evil.

*Longer versions of the articles by Barbara Forbes and Rajan Naidu originally appeared in The Bulletin of Churches and Refugee Network, and The Friend respectively.*

## What do love and justice require of us?

*Rajan Naidu reflects on how his faith motivates him to take direct action on the climate crisis.*

It is tempting, in these times of unprecedented crises, to give up hope of resolving the countless ills and injustices we discover we have absorbed and integrated into ourselves, our lifestyles, traditions, cultures. Our tastes and habits often run counter to our stated principles. Our habits of consumption often nourish ruthlessly exploitative institutions, corporations, regimes that, out of our sight and hearing, inflict terrible damage and suffering on vulnerable communities, our fellow creatures and fragile ecosystems.

We keep to ourselves views that might bring us into conflict with prevailing views and norms. There come times, though, when we can no longer remain silent on some matter of truth, justice, good community, or the defence and protection of those vulnerable and unable to speak for or defend themselves. Then we must speak our truth and mobilise for action.

Mario Savio, said, in 1964: *“There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels ... upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!”*

**By joining in mass movements, people of peace can exert a tempering influence, to ensure actions are rooted in principles of nonviolence and love.**

On 12 May 2022, when I had been bailed to appear in court for breaking an injunction, I returned instead to the Kingsbury Oil Terminal (pictured). With others there I continued our protest against the fact that the government have refused to give an assurance that given we are in a Climate and Ecological Crisis and the Sixth Mass Extinction, they will not issue

new licences for oil or gas exploration and extraction.

Everyone who takes part in any action with Extinction

Rebellion, or in the Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil campaigns, will have engaged in training sessions. It is vital that we go into every situation as calm and well-informed as we can be and with our eyes open. There is no pressure on anyone to do anything they do not feel ready or equipped to do. We develop strong bonds of trust and friendship. That has been a wonderful aspect of our campaigning actions for climate justice. I got to speak with police officers and later, in court, I met ushers and security staff. In conversations we often reached an understanding of mutual respect. When we spoke honestly and quietly of the concerns that led to our actions, police and court officials often showed themselves to be in sympathy with our objectives if not always our methods.

When the four of us arrived in Winson Green prison, Birmingham, a group of prisoners approached us. One said, “You’re those protesters!”. He said they’d all seen us on the news and that we were “famous”. Fellow inmates were generally friendly and well disposed toward us.

As remand prisoners we were allowed to wear our own clothes, minus belts. We were issued with grey tracksuits. The food was not the finest but vegan, sufficient and edible. I shared a cell, or “pad”, with my friend, Peter Morgan. There was a small sink in the room and a toilet with a portable wooden screen for privacy. We spent around 23 hours a day locked in our cells, with an hour for exercise, showering, chatting with other prisoners. This was my first experience of prison.

Each time I have been in a police or prison cell I have experienced the powerfully supportive feeling of knowing I was being held in the light by friends who knew of my situation. For that I will always feel very grateful.



# News from Young Friends

## Junior Yearly Meeting

*Adam Waters reports on his experience at Junior Yearly Meeting, a gathering of British Young Friends aged 15 to 18.*

From 9th-12th April this year, I was lucky enough to attend Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) on behalf of Central England Area Meeting. JYM is a parallel to Britain Yearly Meeting for the next generation of Friends. It was held at the Frontier Centre in rural Northamptonshire (in what seemed like the middle of nowhere), I had an experience I hope I will never forget, and came away deeply inspired to not just talk about the issues facing both Quakers and humanity today, but to act on them, and bear witness to the light that calls us to act.

During JYM, we explored the theme “Compassionate listening and spiritual engagement: How can we strengthen our faith community to make space for action?”

*While I initially found this theme very confusing, after a few days of thought-provoking theme sessions I was able to get a better understanding of it, and “compassionate listening” would roll off the tongue just as easily as “what’s for dinner?”*

The programme effectively related the theme to the need for racial and climate justice as well as Quaker peace-building programmes. This was effectively carried out through workshops I attended with the upcoming Swarthmore lecturer Helen Minnis and Quaker peace worker Hannah Larn.

While this seems heavy, we also had opportunities to have fun and meet new people. By chance I ended up meeting a whole host of people who shared my interest in fantasy fiction, leading to friendships lasting well beyond the moment the trains pulled out of Wellingborough or Northampton, but such is the nature of JYM. Jokes about platypuses, a never-ending

Uno game and accidentally conducting a musical choir were some of the highlights of my JYM experience. All this could not have been possible without the brilliance of the Base Group leaders and everyone who came ready to enjoy a healthy community atmosphere, culminating in tearful expressions of gratitude around a very dangerous-looking bonfire on the final night.

I was also given the responsibility of being on the Nominations Committee to discern the people who should form the Arrangements Committee for next year’s JYM. This was the first time I had been in such a position of responsibility in Quakers and it is safe to say I found it a difficult, though perhaps ultimately rewarding, experience.

I came away from JYM with a renewed determination to not just talk about the issues facing the world today but to act on them, and a renewed empowerment for my future actions. The way Quaker events such as JYM created such a welcoming environment for everyone regardless of how they choose to identify themselves showed me how politics and society should embrace people of all identities and pronouns rather than treating their existence as a thorny political issue to be navigated.

Naturally, none of this could have happened without the brilliance of the Arrangements Committee, the Adult Volunteers and the staff at the Frontier Centre who managed my challenging requirements brilliantly. They are all a great asset to Quakers and the world. The motto of the Frontier Centre, plastered rather excessively over the walls, read “Who do you trust? (Proverbs 3v5)”. JYM has shown me so many people I trust, not just the picture of Paul Parker put up underneath.

The fact I have written this report in such a rush to accommodate political action shows, perhaps more than anything, how much JYM has inspired me. Long may it continue, and with these people up and coming Quakers have a bright future ahead.

*Do you have news to share for the next edition of Roundabout Central England?*

*Please send news, reflections, and notices to: [website@centralenglandquakers.org.uk](mailto:website@centralenglandquakers.org.uk)*

## Catching Dreams

*CEQ young people between the ages of 10 and 15 made these dream catchers at a recent craft workshop and barbecue at Stourbridge meeting house.*



## European and Middle Eastern Young Friends

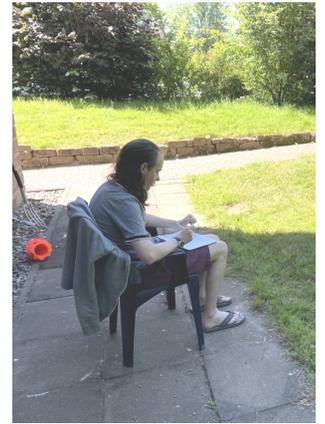
*Pete Doubtfire reflects on a gathering of Quakers aged 18-35ish from across the European and Middle Eastern Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC).*



European and Middle Eastern Young Friends (EMEFYF) met for a Summer Gathering at Bad Pyrmont, Germany from 8th – 16th June. After two years of online-only gatherings, our theme was 'longing for connection in troubled times'. Participants reflected on the sense that, although we had missed coming together in community, we had not fully appreciated quite how

much we missed it until we were face-to-face, hugging and sharing cups of tea.

Having had many nervous email exchanges in the lead-up to the gathering, supporting Young Friends from our Section, I was relieved and elated to see Friends arrive safely from Ukraine (via Slovenia), Georgia and Norway, alongside those who'd made a slightly easier trip from Germany, the Netherlands and Britain. Many of us enjoyed travelling to the gathering by train, and Germany's summer offer of a monthly pass for all local and regional public transport for just 9€ showed a model for sustainable travel which would be wonderful to see here in the UK.



Enjoying the garden at Bad Pyrmont

Summer Gathering was also our first attempt at a hybrid meeting, with remote Friends enriching our time with workshops on pacifism and creative responses to the pandemic. The technology strained our business meetings at times. When the wi-fi cut short one protracted item, a Young Friend dryly responded "internet speaks my mind". We connected across distances more smoothly via Signal (a non-profit alternative to WhatsApp), my own contribution being a daily reflection, in response to which Friends near and far sent messages sharing moments from their daily lives.

Taking advantage of the beautiful setting, we walked through the nearby countryside, guided by a local Friend. This took in nearby Friedensthal (which roughly translates as 'peace-dale') a Quaker community that had been allowed to settle in the late 18th / early 19th Century by a regional ruler who was unusually theologically liberal. As always, the real spirit of the gathering was in truly living together as a community, sharing the things that are eternal and the things that are ephemeral at the washing-up sink or the cooking pot.

I left the gathering feeling spiritually refreshed and reconnected. Returning to Birmingham, I was greeted by a rainbow – a reminder to bring the spirit of this special time to my everyday life.

# Notices & Dates for your Diary

## Coventry Hiroshima Remembrance

**At Coventry Cathedral and online on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2022 1:30 –3:30pm**

Cranes of Peace will fly marking the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb and the 82<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Coventry

All welcome in person or watch online:  
<https://tiny.cc/cathfacebook>

Coventry Quaker Jo Hallett is leading the origami. Pictured here in Coventry Cathedral's chapel of unity – the 1000 cranes behind her, a gift from Hiroshima, on permanent display.



What are we about? Japanese ambassador Nagamine Yasumasa said:

*“Coventry’s Hiroshima Day remembrance is a true symbol of peace and reconciliation. I would like to start by extending my deepest respect to all the people involved for organising this service this year under these unprecedented circumstances. It is truly significant that the Hiroshima Day service has been held for more than 30 years.”*

Coventry Quakers have underpinned Coventry Hiroshima Day annually since 1987.

## Quaker Mental Health Events

### Day Retreat for Quakers who Work in Mental Health

On **Saturday 20th August** there is a day retreat at **Selly Oak meeting house** for Quakers who work in mental health - in any capacity, in paid or voluntary roles. This is a day to come together, to connect, to relax and to share worship together. There's no charge and everyone is welcome.

We will come together, share in worship, there will be gentle, optional activities, there will be space to be quiet, time to connect, to share, to have fun...to be...

There is no charge to attend; you will be asked to contribute to the cost of refreshments.

### Quaker Mental Health Forum

On **Saturday 12th November** the Quaker Mental Health Forum will take place, **at the Priory Rooms and online**. This is an annual event, offering space to reflect on aspects of our well-being from the perspective of our Quaker faith.

There will be speakers sharing and workshops. The theme this year is about moments out of time - transcendent experiences. No charge and everyone is welcome.

You will need to bring your lunch: drinks will be provided. Please let us know if you have any additional needs.

To book either event, contact Alison on [mhdo@quakermhfund.uk](mailto:mhdo@quakermhfund.uk)

Both events are funded by the Quaker Mental Health Fund