

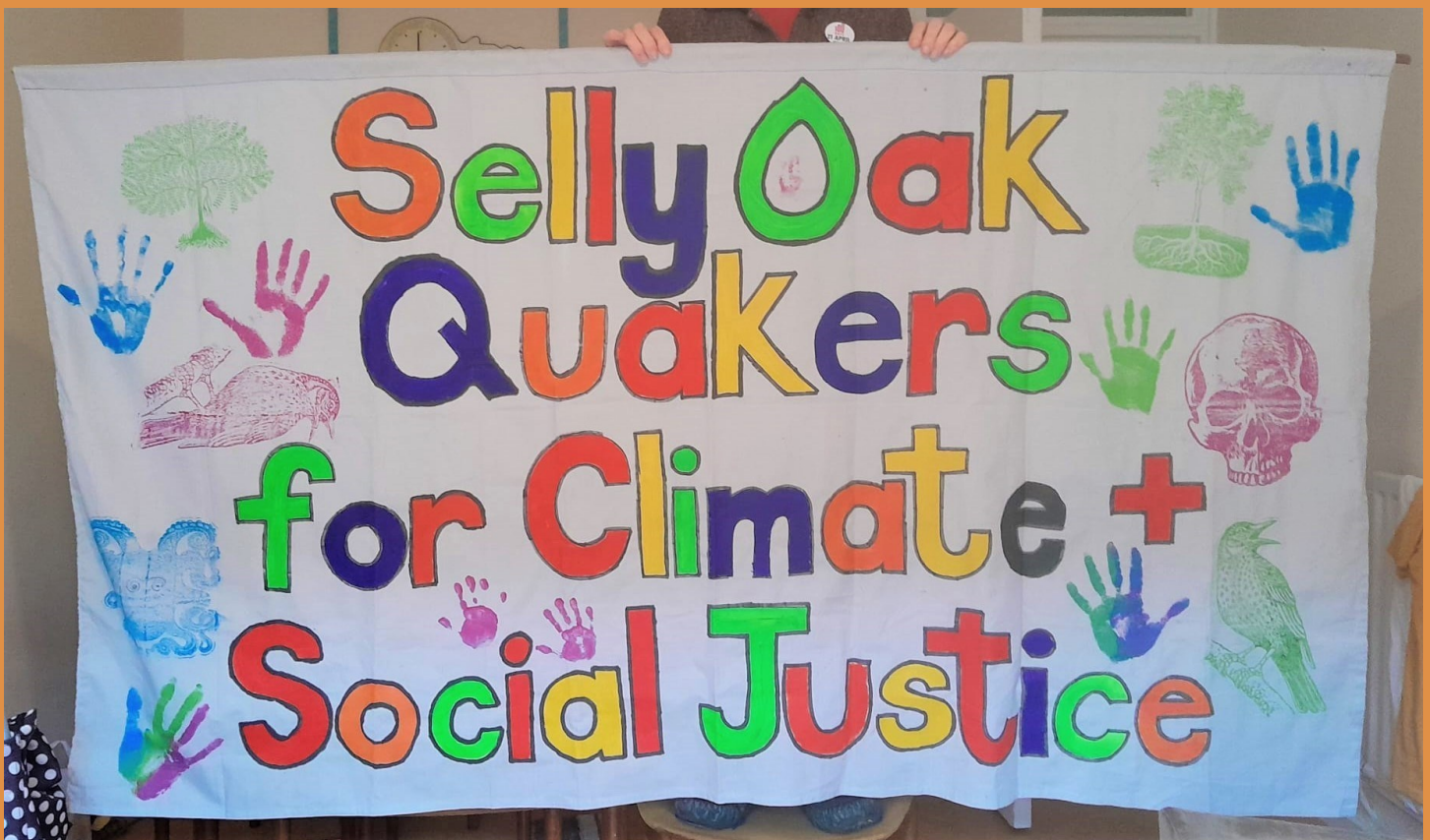


Roundabout Central England



The newsletter of Central England Quakers - Spring 2023
centralenglandquakers.org.uk

Meeting for Joy



Fran Wilde explains how Selly Oak Quakers have been 'meeting for joy':

Selly Oak Meeting has a monthly Friday night Meeting for Joy when Friends share their creative interests and activities. The evening starts with a meal. What better way to go into the weekend?

One of the outcomes of this creative sharing was a hand painted banner with block and hand prints to take to London for Quaker activity with The Big One, 21-24 April. It's very faint, but the O in Oak contains the hand print of our youngest Friend - printed while he was asleep!

Quaker Refugee Hosts

For seven months last year James & Tricia Bradbury of Stourbridge meeting hosted a single mother and her two young children in their home under the Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Viktoriia's journey to UK was torturous. In Odessa she lived close to an army barracks where young soldiers were being trained - a target for Russian missile strikes. Each attack shook the apartment building and broke her windows. Fearing for her children's safety she fled to Bulgaria, with one small suitcase, where she "hotel-hopped" for three months with no money, and limited support from the Bulgarian authorities and church groups until Tricia and James invited her to come to UK, through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Getting her visa documentation sorted was a "voyage of discovery". Eventually she got to Varna airport, with tickets to Luton, only to find that her flight was delayed by 48 hours. She was stranded in a foreign airport with two tearful children and no money. So when they eventually arrived in UK the family was traumatised. Viktoriia was separated from the father of her children, but he was killed in combat after she arrived in the UK, which was very tragic news.

From the moment they arrived in Clent the family received warmth and practical support from the local community.

The children had never been to school before (the entry age in Ukraine is 6) so starting school in a foreign country with no understanding of the language or curriculum was a challenge, but the Clent school and nursery were fantastic, going several extra miles to make the children feel valued and secure. They have been very happy there from "day one".

At Christmas the family received so many presents that it took them a week to open them – and Viktoriia felt overwhelmed by people's generosity and concern.

In early January news came that an ideal home in Clent had been found for Viktoriia to rent but it was unfurnished. Immediately the vicar put something on Facebook to ask for help. Miraculously so many volunteers turned up, that on Saturday 28 January the family was able to move in. At 10.30am the cottage was cold, and totally unfurnished, but by 6pm it was warm and fully furnished. A team of kind people brought donated items directly to the property, from sofas and beds to teaspoons. What a miracle! The warm, welcoming home had pictures up, beds made and food in the fridge. What amazed Tricia and James was that there was just what was needed and everything looked as if it was chosen to go together.

Viktoriia is deeply appreciative of the kindness and compassion that she has experienced here. As a cook and carer she has really useful skills and has started a paid part-time job in the kitchens at a local Nursing Home, having also been a volunteer for several months at another local Home. She is determined to make a future for her children in the UK and to contribute positively to the community.

Tricia and James and Viktoriia and her boys are very grateful to everyone in their local community who has helped, especially those people who donated and delivered items for the cottage. Clent can truly call itself a "Village of Sanctuary".



Village sign near the parish church at Clent by Phil Champion, used under creative commons CC BY-SA 2.0

New Beginnings After Journeyman Theatre

Lynn and Dave Morris are eager to share what they're hoping will happen after they lay down Journeyman Theatre as a touring company.



They see this step not as a retirement but as a cessation of their existence as travelling actors. They both recognised at the same time that the rigours of life on the road, distances travelled, get-ins and get-outs were physically taking their toll. Actual performing has

sometimes been the least stressful part of the process. But for Covid, they would most likely have concluded their travelling work two years earlier but then they might have missed out on some lovely opportunities that have presented themselves since lock down.

As writers, Lynn and Dave are happy to continue to create work for others and as performers, they will always consider requests for poetry readings and literary events.

The Journeyman Legacy Project is now underway and is beginning to bring the last thirteen years into focus.

This project will also contain all of their scripts and they would love to see Quaker Friends and others utilising these scripts in their own work. Lynn is once more back in schools as part of Peacemakers. She loves workshopping, both devising and delivering and feels she can be of service in that way. One thing we all learn from our working lives is that in order for fresh directions to present themselves, we

have to create a bit of space for these things to happen. That's basically what Lynn and Dave are doing.

Apart from Bournville on the afternoon of Saturday May 27th, there is going to be a performance (also of Breeding Grounds) at Stourport Civic Centre on Saturday April 29th at 11am. This will be part of the launch of Wyre Forest's Sustainability Festival (SusFest).

Hopes for the future, as yet unstated, include possibly performing in prisons with no staging or props. Knowing what amazing performers Lynn and Dave are it's easy to imagine that this might offer transformative experiences to prisoners. We wish Lynn and Dave all the best for the future.

Poetry Corner

Promptings of Love and Truth

Walk gently in the garden of the heart,
don't hurry through,
but like a butterfly, explore each part,
pause and sip dew.

Ignore the map which plans you where to go,
and let each view
attract, divert, replace the things you know
with what is new.

You'll find each turn unveils a something more
which speaks to you—
on every path you never trod before
a task to do.

John Lampen 28.1.2023

Written after an Area Meeting contemplation of the first Advice & Query.

Responding to Racism

"If you have come here to help me, then you are wasting your time... But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

— Lilla Watson, Aboriginal activist.

Beginnings:

"I can't breathe!" George Floyd's final breath and some of his closing words on 25th May 2020, and the truth telling of it by teenager Darnella Frazier on her cell phone, awakened many people in this country to what the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the US had been saying.

The media interest in this, and the Black Lives Matter movement have provided increased visibility and resources for anti-racist work. Friends in Britain, Europe and the USA have been publishing work. The first QCEA 2016 study booklet and QPSW's 2018 "Owning Power and Privilege- toolkit for action" led the way in 2020, "Black Lives Matter: Whiteness and racial justice learning for Quakers", a joint initiative from Turning the Tide GB, Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke, zoomed into more than 70 households breaking through the restrictions imposed by Covid 19.

"One cannot be passively non-racist in a society whose very economy has been structured on a racist past."

- Jeff Hitchcock, co-founder of the Center for the Study of White American Culture

From this first quote by Jeff Hitchcock, the course set a clear challenge; this was aimed at white people willing to face their own complicity with racism while also seeking to become faithful witnesses to anti-racism. It changed many of us. A group of Midlands Quakers met on Zoom for mutual support. Our sense of Quaker "concern" deepened. Strengthened by the December 2020 decisions of Quakers in Britain to become an "actively anti-racist church",* we

took our concern to Central England Area Meeting and became a Central England Quaker Recognised Group in April 2022.

Day of Learning – kindness and challenge



On 21st January, organised by this group, 21 Friends met at Hall Green meeting house for the day. There were members and attenders from Bournville, Bull Street, Cotteridge, Hall Green, Selly Oak, Solihull, Stourbridge, Sutton Coldfield and Warwick. It was an opportunity for members of the Area Meeting Responding to Racism Group to meet in person, to worship together, to build resilience and to look at future possibilities. We had decided we needed to do this towards the end of 2022 because since the BYM course, we had only met as a group online and had never been physically together for an extended time of worship.

In thinking about how we could be skilled and resilient in conversations and group facilitation with others in CEQ, we realised we needed to go deeper for ourselves. The Resmaa Menakem's book "My Grandmother's Hands" was suggested as it looks at trauma held sometimes unconsciously in the bodies of black Americans, white Americans and their police forces. It suggests practical ways to centre and settle the body and to model this to other perhaps less settled bodies. Its aim was to avoid the kind of responses that ended with a dead black body; but it seemed appropriate for us as well, as we open up conversations with other Friends, particularly white Friends,

* <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-commit-to-becoming-an-anti-racist-church>

around race and how we feel about and are implicated in racism.

We realised that it was also an opportunity for us to invite and welcome new members who are on this same journey. So there was a double focus – to extend and go deeper for those of us who had already been thinking about this and be useful to Friends who were perhaps newer to the work.

This was not a simple brief to plan around. We tied the parts of the day to the spirit of the book, to allow time for reflection individually, in pairs and larger groups and to include feedback, so that each individual could contribute from where they were starting. Because the day involved experiential body-based exercises to raise and settle disturbance, we did not give participants too much information about what they would be doing before the day – we didn't want to pre-empt and categorise the experience but to allow participants to name their own worlds.



This largely worked. Some people were challenged at some points – not always the same points – and found some things difficult. Participants had many hopes for the day and beyond. A lot of them were around honesty, acknowledgement of a Quaker problem, a greater consciousness of unconscious bias and a need to examine unspoken hierarchies. Many wanted a way to be truly open to allow people to be who they are, to embrace difference and to be caring of people of all kinds including Friends of colour. Some wanted guidance on language and the history that got us all here. We were grateful for how open and willing to engage everyone was. The whole group were ready to be discomfited.

We were able to affirm that it is not a Quaker's God-given right to always be comfortable.

It felt important to have a pastoral elder in place to deal with anything that was triggered and might be too much for a group setting. In fact, the elder was able to participate at various points and was not called to be present individually with anyone during the sessions. Because of their presence throughout, however, we feel we were able to create a safe enough space for everyone. We are very grateful to her and to the Area Meeting Elders' and Pastoral Friends' Support Group.

Having conversations at breaks and lunchtime and sharing good food, in the homely sun-filled meeting room at Hall Green was such an affirming thing to do. And we want to mention one participant who never made it because they had started to feel unwell and didn't want to bring it into the group. And to mention the assistance with lifts given by those who could to those who had mobility issues. And the help given by a non-Quaker partner with the food preparation. There were many instances during the day that affirmed us in our community and faith and gave us all the strength to work hopefully with difficult stuff and move forward together.

Some next steps:

Some of the participants signed up for our online course on responding to racism led by Ruth Wilde. It began on March 9th and is open to all Friends in CEQ. Some individuals are exploring Woodbrooke courses or looking forward to Quaker gatherings. Some are reading. We admit to living and working experimentally so are open to new Light from you! We recognise the importance of conversation held in an atmosphere of trust and humility.

We seek to build relationships with all Local Quaker Meetings both through representation on our R2R Group and through visitation to Meetings should they wish to invite us. R2R continues to meet on Zoom every two months.

We are developing a resource list. Write to CEQ Responding to Racism for a copy: R2R@centralenglandquakers.org.uk

Digital Communication Workshop

Fran Wilde reports on a session exploring digital communication in our Quaker Meetings, held in the morning before November Area Meeting:

Digital tools for personal and group communication are constantly changing. How confident are we in using them? How much do we like and trust them? How can digital communication support the spiritual and social life of Local Meetings and how could it help Quakers reach out to people in their communities?

On 19 November 2022 at a pre-Area Meeting session, interested Friends from a number of meetings spent time assessing their confidence levels in using various online communication platforms, from emails to Tiktok, reviewing the options for spreading the word about their Meeting's events, and hearing about the ways that Central England Quakers (CEQ) uses electronic communications.

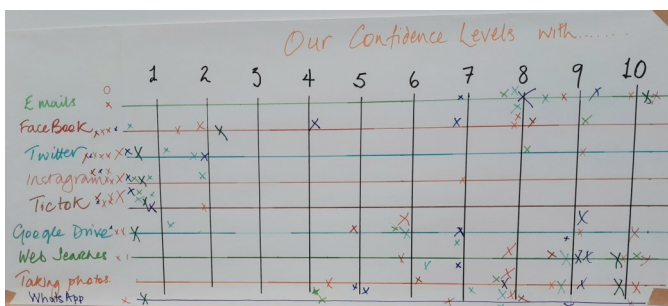


We tried a small group exercise to think about effective ways of spreading information about a hypothetical Local Meeting (LM) Outreach event. It showed that LMs are aware of the huge range of possibilities from Mail Chimp, YouTube videos, local radio coverage, Eventbrite registration, posters, emails to personal phone calls. They are also acutely aware that one format does not suit all. What methods we use are ultimately guided by those preferred by the communities we want to engage, and determined by the capacities and experience that each LM has in using those methods.

The impression was that few people are willing to engage in online posting or responding to public comments. There are concerns about misuse of data by advertisers and even unwanted intrusion. People in the room talked about the frustrations of LM emails going into Friends' spam boxes. Newsletters are mainly sent by email but a few are printed for people who do not have computers and for outreach. Some Friends search online for the activities of other LMs, but most are focused on their own Meeting.

Someone related a vivid illustration of how communications often operate within LMs: "We put the news feed from Area Meeting and our events into a weekly e-newsletter, but still, one of the clerks stands up at the end of each Meeting for Worship and goes through the contents of the newsletter, and at that point people put it in their diaries". However we know how adaptable Quakers have shown themselves to be in times when it's difficult to meet up. Zoom took off during Covid, and Woodbrooke developed a thriving online programme.

Central England Quakers (CEQ) has a well maintained website and provides space for



A chart demonstrated the range of confidence within the room for using different platforms. In terms of direct communication with individuals and Local Groups, as with emails, WhatsApp and Zoom (not seen here) people's confidence is higher. Putting information out into the ether and following it up is another matter. Very few in the group were happy with having to keep up with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and least of all Tiktok, the choice of younger generations.

One Friend declared a vote of no confidence in social media corporates, while another used them for campaigning.

LMs to share upcoming events and news. People can easily sign up to the weekly news feed. The website provides the best up-to-date information for anyone in the region wanting to know what's what. CEQ Facebook posts are simple to share to LM pages as are the Twitter posts on @CEQuakers. Peter Doubtfire, CEQ website administrator, can advise on using CEQ social media and handling emails; contact him on website@centralenglandquaker.org.uk. There is support for LMs through Quaker Life on the Quakers in Britain website.

We need educating, examples, opportunities to experiment and experience! Maybe we need social media support group(s) within CEQ, or even an IT Officer? Young people choose to use social media for communication, but platforms shift in popularity. While online communication is quicker, has huge outreach potential and advantages for people with access issues, our LMs have to be upskilled to keep up.

Are we part of wider online communities? Do we share our values and our activities with individuals and groups who could tune in to our social media, and do we respond to them where we find common ground?

CEQ Communications Committee hopes to hold a follow-up meeting later this year, and will be in touch with Meetings about what Friends would find useful in a workshop.

J'Accuse!

Quaker Hilary Johnson reflects on a recent screening and discussion of the documentary 'J'Accuse', with the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ):

The film 'J'Accuse', produced and directed by Michael Kretzmer, was shown at Barnt Green Meeting House on 7th February 2023. Introduced by Michael himself, it attracted 48 people, mainly members of the Council for Christians and Jews but also Central England Quakers and local people. The documentary reveals the truth about Jonas Noreika, revered as a national hero by his own government, yet a key commander in the mass murder of the Lithuanian Jewish community. The work of his granddaughter, Silvia Foti, through determination to fight for the truth at great personal cost, is remarkable. She has recently been nomi-

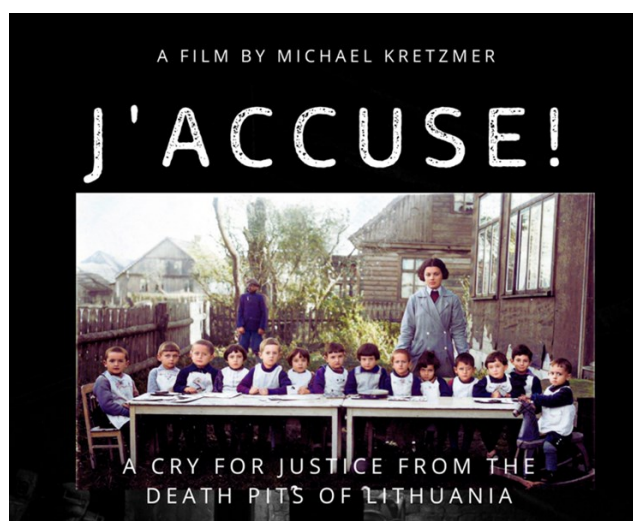
nated for the Nobel Peace Prize. The film also featured Grant Gochin, a South African Jew whose father escaped from Lithuania. Independently of Silvia Foti, for many years Grant has campaigned against the Lithuanian government's systemic Holocaust revisionism. The two are now close friends.

The film prompted lively discussion, raising issues about prejudice, continuing anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. Interestingly, the Holocaust is understood as not just a Jewish tragedy but a Christian one too.

Do anti-Jewish sentiments continue to be preached, however unintentionally, from the New Testament Gospels?

Foti, brought up in a Roman Catholic family, continues to pray within this tradition. Her grandmother, Noreika's wife, and Noreika himself were Roman Catholic. A most thought-provoking remark by her grandmother, after refusing the Eucharistic last rite on her deathbed: "Jesus was a Jew who misled the world" leads us to ponder the meaning of both anti-Semitism and anti-Christianity. It raises questions about the fundamental tenets of any branch of Christianity that can understand Jesus in this way.

My thanks to all who helped me to organise this event. Everyone appreciated the hospitality offered and the high quality of the projection equipment. I've been most encouraged by the interest subsequently shown, not only in the film but in the work of CCJ, and by the potential for future networking.



Notices & Dates for your Diary

Quaker Quicks alert

CEAM's Rhiannon Grant, John Lampen and Eleanor Nesbitt are among the authors of books in the exciting new 'Quaker Quicks' series. Some will be officially released only later this year but advance copies will be available at the book-signing session on Saturday 29 April in Friends House during Britain Yearly Meeting and then from the bookshop. Titles include Geoffrey Durham's *What do Quakers Believe?*, Tim Gee's *Why I am a Pacifist*, Helen Holt's *Quakers and Science*, Eleanor Nesbitt's *Open to New Light: Quakers and Other Faiths*, Rhiannon Grant's *Quakers Do What! Why?* and Mark Russ's *Quaker Shaped Christianity*.

Coventry Meeting will be having a Quaker Quicks-themes series of study groups. Do consider starting this in your Meeting too.



Quaker Quicks on display at the Friends House bookshop, photo by Joan Geodas

The Quaker Service Memorial Exhibition

Outreach at Barnt Green

You are welcome to join us

Designed to be displayed separately from the Stone Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, this exhibition will be on display at

Barnt Green Friends Meeting House
6 Sandhills Lane
Barnt Green
B45 8NR

Friday 9th June 10.30 – 18.00

Saturday 10th June 14.00 – 18.00

For further details email:

ceqengagingwithscripture@gmail.com



Volunteers are also needed for both practical tasks like setting up or serving refreshments, and for talking to the public. If you are interested, please contact Hilary Johnson on the email address above.

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