



Roundabout Central England



The newsletter of Central England Quakers—Spring 2024
centralenglandquakers.org.uk

Capturing the Spirit of Bournville



Photography Project: 125 years of Bournville Village Trust

2025 will mark the 125th anniversary of the Bournville Village Trust so artist and photographer Stuart Whipps is starting a photography project in Bournville that aims to comprehensively document the village at this pivotal time. He has begun taking photos everywhere around and was keen to include taking some of Bournville Quaker Meeting at worship.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity took place 18th – 25th January 2024. Gill Waddilove and Hilary Johnson share their experiences of events that took place in Coventry and Birmingham.

Service at the Chapel of Unity, Coventry

Finding shared endeavour is a powerful motivator in bringing positive change to the world. The parable of the Good Samaritan is one familiar to many of us; hearing it retold as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was a reminder of the importance of accepting the wrongs we have done to others in our community as part of a process of healing and moving forward.



We were welcomed at the beginning of the service by the symbolic gesture of water being poured by Revd. Deacon Leo Poole from an earthenware jug into a hollow gourd carried ceremonially into the round within the Chapel of Unity by Fr. Aloysius Bukonya (St.

Mary and St. Benedicts, Hillfields).

This expression of hospitality and fellowship provided a very visible centering of worship for the gathered community in the chapel.

A central theme for the service this year was to consider the challenges faced by the people of West Africa, in particular, Burkina Faso whose communities are facing immediate danger as part of an ongoing regional conflict, especially in the east of that country.

The service, led by Canon Mark Bratton, Chair of the Chapel of Unity Council, featured speakers representing many of the churches who are regular contributors to worship at the Chapel of Unity.

Find out more about the Chapel of Unity and its work in bringing together people from across the West Midlands at: chapelofunity.org.uk

Pray24Brum 2024: Love God; Love your Neighbour

Pray24Brum returned to St Philip's Cathedral to celebrate its tenth anniversary. The 24 hours were filled with regular contributors and newcomers, including not only church congregations, but also students from Queen's Foundation, schoolchildren, chaplains and refugees. Each hour was different: prayers, singing, dancing, a labyrinth-walk, readings and times for reflection.

During our Quaker hour, we interspersed words with periods of silence, reflection and music. We began with an explanation: we meet together in a silence that grows into stillness, in which we may experience something of the presence of God. Clearing our minds of clutter, we reflected on the words:

**Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the
nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.
(Ps46.10)**

'Love God': we considered the commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. It reminds us of the first commandment, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, over 3,000 years ago: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me.

Our loving God is two-way. God seeks us; we are created in God's image, connected if we open our hearts and minds, yet free to ignore God if we wish. Note the detail 'out of the house of bondage'.



Hilary and Pray24Brum organiser Steph

This doesn't simply mean physical slavery, (though in the history of the giving of these commandments, freedom from physical slavery was uppermost) but also freedom from inner slavery; freedom to develop and grow, making choices including mistakes, so that we become ourselves fully in God's image.

'Love your neighbour as yourself': Before loving your neighbour, first love yourself, not in any egotistical way, but simply because the image of God rests within your soul. Through guided meditation, we reflected upon the soul.

Imagine for a moment you are a gardener, tending the garden of your soul.

Not the Garden of Eden, but your workaday garden needing regular attention. Today you wish to work on just one patch. It's a mild day, as you put on old clothes, and take your fork and trowel.

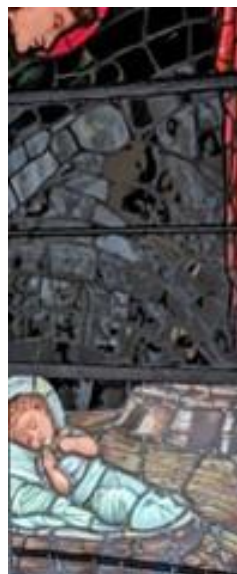
Clear the light weeds; fork out the deeper weeds – put them all into a bucket. Scrape the soil back to get at any tough roots that need to be pulled out to put on the compost, to rot down for use next year. Let fresh air and light reach the soil beneath. Sit back for a while and contemplate.

The weeds represent the rubbish that clutters up the space of the mind; the unnecessary baggage that now serves no useful purpose and needs to be burnt. Remember that fire purifies. The tough roots represent those difficult times that need to be composted, perhaps already have been; those sorrowful and painful experiences that are/were necessary and have, in truth, helped you to mature and grow.

Return now to the soil. Fork through again; run it through your fingers; appreciate how it becomes a fine tilth in your hands.

There's something underneath the surface. Scrape the soil back gently with your hands and look. It has a hard surface, slightly bumpy – rather like a corm.

A corm is a hardy tuber; its underground swollen stem stores energy in order to survive extreme adverse conditions. Resting for some of the year, it flourishes and flowers. A hardy cyc-



Recently restored windows at St Philip's

lamen or the enormous titan arum lily are good examples. Let light and air get to this corm. You cannot dig it out. Its deep roots cannot be lifted. Feed and water it so it will begin to flower.

The corm represents your beautiful soul. Jesus says 'be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.' Jesus doesn't say, 'become perfect'. As you clear away clutter, you reach perfection within yourself.

This exercise may have felt uncomfortable whilst at the same time being beneficial. As we sit quietly, we pray for healing, as we hear the reassuring words from Handel's Messiah (Isa 40:11 & Matt 11:28-29).

'Love your neighbour', who is created in the image of God, just as you are.

This profound truth means that you are required, without naivety, to relate to the image of God in others, even if you don't particularly like them. This leads us to the great commandment, which applies to all world faiths and none: 'Do to others what you would like to be done to you. Do not do to others what you would not like to be done to you'.

During our closing silence, we reflected on Isaac Penington's 'Our life is Love', set to music.

Links to further reading can be found on the Central England Quakers website: centralenglandquakers.org.uk/pray24brum

Freedom for All Seder

Peter Doubtfire reflects on an invitation to join a Seder meal - the Jewish celebration of Passover.

On 28th April I joined a Freedom for All Seder at The Warehouse in Digbeth. This community Seder was held just after Passover with around 12 people (plus space for Elijah and Miriam), including Jews, Christians, Quakers and people of no particular faith. Although we were small in number, this lent the event a cosy atmosphere, and sense of community. We were grateful to our Jewish hosts for sharing this ritual meal, and explaining the symbolic meaning of the foods and actions. For the organisers, the importance of the Seder was not ritual for the sake of it, but to connect its meaning to our current world – an approach that resonated with me as a Quaker.

In that spirit, we were invited to participate in this celebration of Jewish liberation and resistance, as a way to call for the collective liberation of all peoples.

The structure of the Seder tells the story of Exodus, eating special foods from the Seder plate to symbolise the pain of slavery and exile, and the hope of a better life. As we told this story together, we particularly thought of those suffering in Gaza, and also of people struggling against oppression around the world, including refugees facing the hostile environment here in the UK. At many points we were offered reflections and questions to challenge us and open dialogue, which resonated with the idea of Advices and Queries.

Small acts helped make the traditions more inclusive, including vegan food and non-alcoholic wine; references to 'Freedom' and 'Mitzrayim' (the narrow place) to distinguish these ideas from the modern states of Israel and Egypt; the inclusion of an orange and spoon on the Seder plate to symbolise LGBTQ+ and disability liberation, and of olives for Palestine; and using both feminine and masculine grammar in Hebrew readings.



Toy frogs adorned the table to represent the 10 plagues

Amidst reflection and discussion on these difficult topics, there was also opportunity for laughter and singing:

Holding both lightness and darkness is, our hosts assured us, very much part of any Jewish event.

The format of a bring-and-share meal helped build a sense of community, and allowed conversation to flow between readings and reflections. Quakers avoid ritual tied to times and seasons, but we also try to live the spirit of traditional holy days in the everyday. There was much for us to learn from here, about finding meaning in ancient practices that challenges us to face modern day injustice; and about maintaining hope for a better future by embedding spiritual practice in a genuine sense of community. I am very grateful to our hosts and hope we can continue to share both interfaith dialogue and action for justice. As the toast to end the Seder envisions: "next year, in Freedom!"



A vegan Seder plate, photo by Molly Jade, Creative Commons CC-BY-SA-NC 2.0

Book reviews:

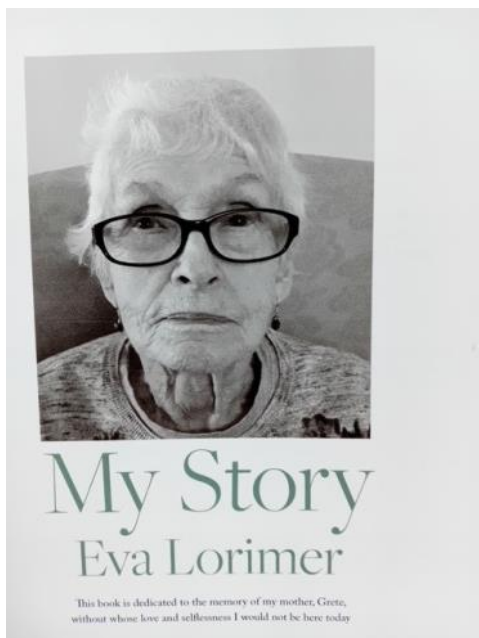
'My Story' by Eva Lorimer

Reviewed by Bob Morris

Eva Lorimer who attends Hall Green Meeting was born just over ninety years ago in Wismar, Northern Germany as Eva Toni Rhein. Her maternal grandparents were Jewish but they converted to Lutheran Christianity along with Eva's mother, Greta. Her father, Hermann, was not Jewish and was therefore considered 'pure' by the Nazi regime. In 1935 the Nuremberg Race Laws made it illegal for Aryans to be married to Jews so her father divorced her mother who was then forced to leave Wismar and return to Hamburg where she had grown up. Four years later, Greta Rhein had the bravery and foresight to secure a place for her daughter on the Kindertransport. Eva left Germany on August 10th 1939, her sixth birthday, not returning for some fifty years.

This is the background to the book 'My Story' that Eva wrote with the support of the Association of Jewish Refugees during the Covid pandemic and which was published last year. It gives a first-hand account of Eva's life after coming to Britain, her work as a primary school teacher in Birmingham and her difficult marriage.

I found the book very moving; it is intensely personal and private and in many ways quite shocking.



It is dedicated to her mother who as Eva has said 'wanted above all for her daughter to be happy'. But I am afraid the picture Greta painted of a loving and welcoming family in England ready to greet her daughter was far from the case.

Eva had been taken in by Rev. and Mrs. Doherty in Worthing. Mrs. Doherty was very much in charge of childcare but clearly she did not understand that her young charge missed her mother terribly and was desperate for love and affection. After some eight months Eva was sent as a boarding student to a school near the Vicarage and faced the challenges of making friends and establishing herself in a new environment made worse when an older girl realised she was from Germany, the enemy. There was no news of her mother ; indeed Eva learned subsequently that her father had remained in Wismar but that her mother had been deported to Riga where she had been killed.

There is more in the book of Eva's life as an adult, of qualifying and practising as a teacher, of her marriage to a controlling husband, of meeting up with her father some fifty years after she left Germany and of Eva's children, David and Jo and her grandchildren, Gaby and Archie. Some original documents and lovely photos of the young Eva are reproduced to bring the narrative to light.

The story of Eva's life is very challenging but the kindness of some people shines through - Lisa Eck, an old school friend of her mother's and Lottie, Hermann Rhein's fourth wife, whom Eva considered a friend. Eva describes how she gradually broke out of the protective wall she had built around her personal feelings in her early life. My abiding impression is of Eva's resilience in making a life in Britain and of the courage of her mother, without whose love and selflessness, as Eva says, she would not be here today.

Eva's story is one of 43 published by The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) under the general title 'My Story'. It can be accessed online at ajrmystory.org.uk

'Do Quakers Pray?' by Jennifer Kavanagh

Reviewed by 'J'

Enlightening, empowering and enchanting, this book is a life-enriching experience for anyone wishing to understand exactly what prayer involves and how to embed it in a life of prayer.

The book is easy to read and is woven with beautiful nuggets of wisdom on prayer, prompting the reader into deep thought. Simple and very effective in its message it arouses the reader into an awakening of a prayerful life. Explaining the notion of prayer, it leaves a positive impression in what can be an often-misunderstood way of life.

The book is a great tool to develop a life of inner stillness, peace and spiritual practice.

Distilling often preconceived concepts it elucidates the concept of prayer allowing the reader to explore it as part of their own spiritual life.

Although the book may look like it is tailored to Quakers, anyone can read it and take advice from a spiritual perspective on how to develop a prayer life. It's truly a wonderfully written book for people from all faiths and backgrounds.

Jennifer's skill of writing and penmanship produces a page-turning and life-improving experience. Insights and experiences from various Quakers enhance the book's message, with excerpts from their lived experience. These experiences add depth and beauty to the meaning of prayer.

The book gives life a new meaning, a new purpose and a new beginning. The message of the book is beautifully crafted. It is a useful guide for those individuals seeking a peaceful, tranquil and serene way of living, using prayer as the light in our lives.

A must-read for anyone wishing to understand prayer and a brilliant reference book that can be read over and over again. It brings the power of peace and prayer, particularly during

a time of global adversity. It is a much-needed antidote in a world of hostility. This book can truly bring transformative change.

'Do Quakers Pray?' can be ordered at bookshop.quaker.org.uk

Interfaith 'Unity Iftar'

Chris Martin reports on an interfaith Unity Iftar, held at Adam Mosque and Dawah Academy, Balsall Heath, on Sunday 7 April.

Adam Mosque is an outward looking Sunni mosque that 'hosts many guests, visitors and dignitaries every year ranging from schools, universities, tourists, community organisations, health workers, police, policymakers, and many more.'

The Unity Iftar was attended by about 15 interfaith representatives and about 40 members of the local congregation came for evening prayers.

The evening was a good example of 'interfaith alive and flourishing in Birmingham'.

The program was built around interfaith unity, with a range of speakers.

Imam Qiyam (who I had met at the Clifton Road Iftar a couple of weeks previously) spoke about the common roots of Judaism, Islam and Christianity and the way in which Islam acknowledges Jesus as a prophet. He noted that Mary, Mother of Jesus, is mentioned 18 times in the Bible but many more times in the Koran.

Markus Capers, Riverside Church (which runs a food pantry and provides debt advice) and Mauricio Silva, Columban Missionaries Birmingham, each said a short prayer.

Richard Tetlow spoke about celebrating difference and living together in Birmingham in ways that acknowledge differences, not trying to make everybody the same or have the same beliefs.

Mandy Ross, Birmingham Progressive Synagogue, spoke very movingly about the present tensions in Israel - Gaza, the need for

everybody to work for peace and that there was no such thing as a 'just war'. She mentioned how Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg* had called for peace saying in a statement 'God of Israel and all humanity will help us find a way to a peaceful resolution, with security for Israel and a viable future for the civilian population of Gaza, without any more appalling bloodshed'.

Mandy also spoke of Kamran Shezad coming to the Iftar held at the Progressive synagogue a couple of weeks ago with other Muslim leaders and quoted an extract from a prayer Kamran had offered:

Ya Allah, You are the Creator, the All-Powerful, the Sustainer of all life

Ya Allah, we are gathered here today with our interfaith friends to show solidarity with refugees, Ya Allah, give us the strength to show more compassion for their plight, soften our hearts to their situation and guide us in seeking justice and mercy on their behalf.

Ya Allah, we pray for an end to the wars, poverty and human rights abuses that drive desperate people to become refugees in the first place.

Ya Allah, we cannot sit here in prayer and not hold in our hearts the crisis that we are seeing the Middle East. Ya Allah, let violence end in the region.

Ya Allah, our hearts break for those killed and those left behind—for the orphaned child, the injured elderly, those abducted and families desperate for safety.

Ya Allah, we pray for those who have lost loved ones.

Ya Allah, please protect and provide for those who have been abducted and bring them home safely. Ya Allah, let them be reunited with their loved ones.

Ya Allah, we pray for the opening of humanitarian corridors to allow food, essentials and medical supplies to reach those in need.

Ya Allah, give strength to the suffering people in the face of the escalating humanitarian crisis

Ya Allah, we pray that aid workers be able to rescue the injured, comfort the grieving and help rebuild many lives.

Ya Allah, we pray for peace and reconciliation to overcome conflict.

We ask that you give wisdom and direction to our global leaders and those in power who have the ability to impact the course of this conflict.

Ya Allah, many friends have come together today for the greater good, I beg you to shower us with your blessings of guidance and bring us all to goodness.

Ya Allah, strengthen the bonds of friendship between us, help us to be bold advocates and to be strong agents of peace in our own communities.

Peter Rookes, Birmingham Council of Faiths, spoke about the withdrawal of Government funding for the Inter Faith Network. He emphasised the importance of National Interfaith Week and Ramadan as focal times for interfaith activity in Birmingham.

Toby Crow, vicar of Christ Church Sparkhill, made fun of the ridiculous suggestion by a government minister, that 'Sparkhill is a no go area for non-Muslims'.

Shanshed M Khan, founder of the Islamic Exhibition and Unity Mosque, returned to the theme of the commonalities between the three Abrahamic faiths in Birmingham.

I had conversations about the Birmingham Faith Climate Action Project (BiFCAP) including with Simeone Locke, a regional organiser for Operation Mobilisation who had been a Christian missionary in Mali for 10 years.

Several references were made by speakers to the how much the rest of the world could learn from Birmingham.

*Friends may be interested to know that Jonathan Wittenberg is the Rabbi of New North London Synagogue and Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism where Esther Boyd's daughter-in-law is also a Rabbi.



Remembering Barbara Groombridge

The clerk of Central England Area Quaker Meeting Communications Committee, Barbara Groombridge, has recently died. Over the years Barbara has offered such love and support to us all that she will be greatly missed. Always calm and balanced in her running of meetings and clear and insightful in her organisation she set a wonderful example for us and we want to say how thankful we are to have known and worked with her.

Notices & Dates for your Diary

Friends' Cinema at Barnt Green

Barnt Green & Redditch Quakers invite you to join them at their monthly film showings.

Barnt Green & Redditch Quaker Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green, B45 8NR

18th May 7pm—Delightful Irish comedy romance

15th June 7pm—Award-winning Mendelssohn ballet, based on a Shakespeare comedy

Bournville Lunchtime Concerts

First and third Fridays of the month, 1pm at Bournville Quaker Meeting House, 65 Linden Rd, B30 1JT:

17th May Darren Hogg (organ)

7th June Russell Painter (tenor) and Dick Price (piano)

21st June Victoria Harley (soprano) and Elizabeth Haughan (piano)

5th July Robert Markham (piano).

19th July Katherine Ley (cello) and Amy Butler (piano)

Create and Connect at Cotteridge

Do you enjoy drawing, painting, knitting, crotchet, sewing, weaving...? Or would you like to have a go for the first time?

Come and join in art/craft projects supplied by us, or simply bring your own handywork to do in a companionable, relaxed atmosphere. We will provide hot drinks and light refreshments.

Sessions are on the last Wednesday of each month 2-4pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, 23A Watford Rd, Birmingham, B30 1JB

Visit another meeting Sundays

On the 5th Sundays in a month: a regular opportunity for informal intervisitation to help strengthen our sense of community across the area meeting.

On the following Sundays in 2024 we encourage Friends and Meetings to go visiting:

30th June 2024

29th September 2024

29th December 2024

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

Please send news, reflections, and notices to: website@ceaqm.org.uk

Sign up for the weekly email newsfeed at centralenglandquakers.org.uk/newsfeed