

Newsletter

Welcome to this edition of our Newsletter. The big theme is Black Lives Matter. Both Alison Crane (page 2) and Mary Brown (page 4) write about their experiences from a course which they both attended over the summer; while Amelia Schafer-Rutherford (page 5) adds a personal perspective.

Also in this edition, Sue Barrance (page 7) writes about poetry in prison; and Andrea Rigby (page 9) brings us up-to-date with Quaker Action on Domestic Abuse. Geof Kinns (page 10) writes about suffering; and we have a review of Jane Mace's recently-published book *Passion and Partings*.

Julia Price, who normally prepares the Newsletter for publication to such a high standard, has not been able to work on this issue, so you will have to make do with this simpler and less-professional layout. We hope you enjoy it nonetheless!

Peter Carter, Elyn Mitchell.

Elyn Mitchell finds inspiration in these words from Clarissa Pinkola Estes:

Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good.

What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take everyone on Earth to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale.

One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires, causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of soul in shadowy times like these -- to be fierce and to show mercy toward others; both are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do.

There will always be times when you feel discouraged. I too have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it. I will not entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate.

In that spirit, I hope you will write this on your wall: When a great ship is in harbor and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But that is not what great ships are built for.

George Floyd isn't a wakeup call - the same alarm has been ringing since 1619, y'all just keep hitting "snooze"

(written on placard at Black Lives Matter protest)

How does it feel to say "I am white"? This was one of the exercises in the "Black Lives Matter - whiteness and Racial Justice learning for Quakers" course run by QPSW over the summer that I attended. In our break out groups on Zoom, we were asked to repeat this to each other five times. I started off embarrassed, apologetic, turned defensive, then defiant.

All of us in the group found it difficult, particularly as one person told us she had discovered that the term "white" in this context, was introduced by law in the US in the 17th century, specifically to give poor white people more rights than black people¹. Racist by definition.

It's easy to feel that we don't want to be associated with those nasty racist white supremacists. Racism is nothing to do with us. John Woolman said, in 1763, "oppression in the extreme appears terrible, but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression; and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive".

In my own experience, I have thought of being white as the default. It's normal - that is, I don't have to think about the colour of my skin. I have been arrested in nonviolent direct actions, believing correctly that I will be treated well by the police, but mistakenly thinking that this is because of the British justice system. And I've wondered why there were so few black peace protesters. If I was a black man used to being stopped and searched, or suspected of being a terrorist, I would know differently.

I'm sure I'm not the only Quaker who doesn't think too carefully about what I'm wearing when I go out - what a privilege! Black women are used to being watched in clothes shops by staff who suspect them at best of not being able to afford the clothes they sell, or at worst, that they have shoplifting in mind. The same applies to black men if dressed casually, and if smartly dressed, especially if driving an expensive car, they are suspected of being drug dealers.

With George Floyd's death, and subsequent news from the United States, there is a temptation to think that police violence is an American problem, but on the course we learned about British people who died as a result of police intervention. What do we know or remember about Mark Duggan, Cynthia Jarrett, Mikey Powell or Clinton McCurbin, to name a few? We were encouraged to "say their names" and look them up - an important but difficult experience that I still haven't completed.

I learnt about “white fragility”², how we get defensive at the slightest hint that we might have done or said something offensive to black people, or how we turn a conversation about racism to being about how we might have been victimised, or how guilty we feel. I thought, “I wouldn’t do that”. But I do! One session, we heard some powerful stuff, including Sophie Bevan, a British black global majority (BGM) Quaker, talking about the micro aggressions she faces “The frustration is constant, inescapable and oppressive. You cannot imagine it. You cannot empathise. You don't understand”³. We were asked to discuss what we had learnt in our break out groups, but I just started talking about how I was feeling. Another time, talking about racism with Cheltenham Friends, we moved on to talking about feminism and our experiences as women - much more comfortable to talk about how we are oppressed than how we are the oppressor!

As Sophie Bevan says, “we can’t be not racist; we can only be complicit in racism, or actively against it.”⁴

So I’ve been saying, “What can I do?” That’s why I did the course, to find out what I can do - but how did I get to my age without having to actively engage with racism, and without knowing what to do? As one of the participants on the course said, “We are all part of the problem, and we are all part of the solution.”

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting “Undoing Racism” group suggests four areas of work⁵, which I have adapted and generalised as follows:

- Learn about racial justice
- Have black friends
- Connect with or support black communities
- Reflect on and review what we do

Can we work together on this as Gloucestershire Quakers?

I have lots of reading material, but as a start, here are some of the sources that I have referred to above:

- 1 Paul Kivel: <https://christianhegemony.org/why-black-lives-havent-mattered-the-origins-of-western-racism-in-christian-hegemony>
- 2 Robin DiAngelo: White Fragility – book and various You Tube videos
- 3 Sophie Bevan: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/a-response-to-black-lives-matter-by-a-bgm-quaker>
- 4 Sophie Bevan and Elliott Burcham: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/the-system-isn-t-broken-it-was-built-this-way>
- 5 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Undoing Racism group: <https://urginpym.wordpress.com/priorities-and-plan-of-action/>

Alison Crane (Cheltenham)

Black Lives Matter

Mary Brown (Stroud) writes :

Of course Quakers are not racist! We welcome BAME people to our meetings, and worry that we do not seem to attract many. But while we may not be overtly racist the white majority of us inevitably benefit from 'white privilege.'

We do not have to worry each time we go out that we might be stopped by the police for no reason.

We do not see teachers underestimating the ability of our children, or misinterpreting their natural outgoingness as misbehaviour.

When we do not get a job we wanted, we know it is not because of the colour of our skin.

White privilege is a part of capitalism, and, like capitalism, is linked closely with the slave trade.

When the Black Lives Matter movement erupted, following the death of George Floyd, Woodbrooke laid on a five week zoom course entitled Black Lives Matter. It attracted around 80 Friends from all over the country, including four Friends from this AM. We learned about white privilege, white fragility, and the involvement of Quakers in the slave trade. (Alison Crane has more to say about the course elsewhere in this newsletter.)

At the suggestion of the Woodbrooke course those four local Friends have formed a Black Lives Matter group initially based in Stroud, meeting regularly to take this learning and this concern further; two more Friends have joined us, and we would welcome others in the AM.

In our final follow-up session, some weeks after the rest of the course we looked at what we had been doing locally and what more we could do. The suggestion was made that Friends should apologise for our part in the slave trade, from which we are still benefiting, and perhaps pay some reparations.

Could this be 'what love requires of us'? Other groups have apologised, including the Baptist Church and the Bank of England. Just what these apologies involved we need to find out. Perhaps we might set up a Restorative Justice conference, with some representative group of BAME people similar to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Our new BLM group backs this suggestion.

What do other Friends think?

Exciting Times

I'm feeling a bit agitated and anxious today, as I watch the city of my birth and of my university days go up in flames. I'm also painfully aware of the noise increasing from the road as the traffic goes back to normal. I miss the peace and quiet of the beginning of lockdown when the traffic had stopped.

But I have "White Privilege", which means I have the power to be wistful about these things in a very superficial way. If I still lived in poor neighbourhoods as I did when I was a student in Minneapolis, I would still have more power as a white poor person than my counterpart in the African-American community. If I were a single parent and needed to keep my family out of debt, I would have still been able to go to work and get there safely.

Understanding other people's difficulties and plights is not about feeling guilty about our joys and privileges. It's about being willing to share them. This means sharing place and power in society more than anything else.

I've been listening to Reni Eddo Lodge's book *Why I No Longer Talk to White People about Racism*. To say I am enjoying it doesn't seem right, but actually that is correct. I can relate to the illustrations and points that she makes; although I'm not sure I could do without some of the experiences that I have had. One of them is being a foreigner and not just in this country, also being an outsider - "the other".

The second experience is one that I ministered about in Meeting for Worship last week. It happened a couple of years ago. It was an experience I had travelling to Woodbrooke, in Birmingham. A young black man went into a rage when he seemed to be being denied access to the bus by the bus driver who was older, white and male. The dramatic situation I saw unfolded exactly the way that is described in Reni's book. It is about the small changes that allow racism to exist that are seemingly undramatic, yet for people of colour it is constantly there in their lives.

After Meeting, several people suggested that there were things I could have done in that situation and, quite frankly, I'm glad I didn't. As a white person of privilege, it's very easy to make these situations once again about our power as opposes to actually empowering either the African-American population or other minorities. It's about making my privilege everyone's reality.

Amelia Schafer-Rutherford (Forest of Dean)

Precious minutes ..

The minutes prepared by Friends applying for membership of the Society and their Supporting Friends are precious and inspiring. When a membership minute is read out at Area Meeting, it is generally the highlight of the meeting.

But what happens to these minutes after we have welcomed the new Friend into membership? Nick Peters (Gloucester) and Jane Mace (Nailsworth) explain:

Anyone wishing to become a member of the Society of Friends is able to explore their wish with the help of (normally two) Supporting Friends. The applicant and the Supporting Friends together prepare a short written statement to give expression to their process of discernment.

It is our practice for the AM in session then to hear this statement (or 'minute') read aloud.

The AM clerk keeps one copy of every such minute on file and in due course passes it on to our Area Meeting Archive held in Gloucester Meeting house. Anyone who wants to look at them needs to consult Nick, our Custodian of Records.

After thirty years have elapsed we then deposit these minutes in the County Record Office for safekeeping. There is a protocol for the care of such documents, and in accordance with this, they remain 'closed' to the public until they are 100 years old. This means that anyone wanting to look at them in the Record Office is welcome to do so (with the usual arrangements there) but only if they can show the staff a letter of permission from the current Gloucestershire Area Meeting Clerk.

One hundred and seven minutes of membership between 1994 and 2017 have recently joined the files in our archive in Gloucester Friends Meeting House.

Anyone can visit the County Record Office (also known as the Heritage Hub) in Gloucester, by arrangement, and ask to see records. For details, look for Society of Friends (catalogue code D1340) through this link
<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/online-catalogue/>

Entry into membership of the Religious Society of Friends is a public acknowledgement of a growing unity with a community of people whose worship and service reflect, however imperfectly, their perception of discipleship and their recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. This unity is grounded in the experience of being 'gathered' in the love of God in the silent expectancy of our meetings for worship and in a willingness to surrender ourselves in a corporate seeking for the will of God in such measure as we can comprehend it.

Quaker Faith and Practice, 11.04

Time Inside

There are numerous organisations providing bible study correspondence courses for prisoners. JD began a few years ago and appreciates how much he has learnt and understood from his industry. He has helped others with the reading and writing required as well as the understanding of the content. Now in his early 70s, he feels he can happily call himself a Christian. It has changed his approach to life and his relationships with other people and the planet.

I got to know him because we both support an elderly resident with learning difficulties who values the sense of achievement he gets when sending off his booklets and is filled with delight when they come back with encouraging comments and ever better marks from a supportive tutor. JD and I have a discussion session each week over our lunch. Recently the focus was Matthew Arnold's poem Dover Beach.

Many of you, like me, may have come across it in school. It was used by the Sea of Faith movement in a way that I had not considered before as an analogy for the decline in faith that Arnold was seeing in the late nineteenth century. The poem below was JD's response to Dover Beach. It is entitled Sands of Faith.

I see the tide advancing towards me
the water's edge with circular sweeps
covers the patterns adorning the sand
made by crabs, lugworm casts, and
the joyful footprints of happy people.
The sea pauses for a while
before receding and leaving
smooth pristine clean sand ready for all of us creatures
to leave our unique but temporary mark again.
Albeit we are human, shaped by God,
we are not grains of inert sand
shaped by nature's forces.
We have a gift of thought and reason
and should not turn that to treason,
against the one who created and loves us.
Let us keep on walking,
leaving our imprint in the sand
safe in the knowledge
that as they are washed clean away
so are our sins
leaving our soul pure for our Lord.

Sue Barrance (Stroud)

Passion and Partings

Alison Crane (Cheltenham) reviews a recently published book by Jane Mace.

In her book “Passion and Partings, the dying sayings of early Quakers”, Jane Mace invites us to share her enthusiasm as she discovers glimpses into the lives and thoughts of founding Friends. She sees her research as “a conversation with people long gone”.

The book is based on the volumes “Piety Promoted”, published in the 17th and 18th centuries, which include transcripts of words spoken by Quakers as they lay dying. This habit - both the speaking and the publishing of the transcripts, seems very odd to me, but as Jane says, the words are “not so much a set of guides about death and dying as about life and living” and certainly, it is what is written and what Jane has discovered about the individuals’ lives that is interesting to me.

I was particularly intrigued by Alice Curwen from Cumbria, who travelled to America and Barbados in the 1670s with her husband, both having been imprisoned in this country. I have learned recently, and Jane gives a reference to this, that thousands of Quakers lived in Barbados at that time, almost all of them slave owners. Alice had a relatively long life, dying aged 60.

Deborah Bell also captured my imagination - she died in 1738 aged 49. The story of her death in the 7th volume of Piety Promoted is particularly intimate and moving, being written by her husband, John, who also edited that volume. John was distressed and clearly wanted Deborah to recover, but she spoke of God’s will, and said she was ready.

This willingness to die occurs often in the transcripts, and feels uncomfortable to me. Perhaps it is more understandable for those who are in pain with illness or have reached an old age, but Elizabeth Braithwait who died in prison, aged 17, also spoke of her contentment. Indeed one of Elizabeth’s friends “asked her why she was so willing to dye?”

Jane reminds us that at this time bereavement was a common experience. War, disease and persecution took their toll. I can see that it is good for those who are grieving to be able to talk openly and engage with death, in a way that currently seems taboo in this country.

The title of the book is a vast improvement on “Piety Promoted”, for modern day readers! Jane explains, “I had assumed both piety and pious people to be dutiful, scriptural and solemn. In these accounts of early Quakers, however, I found three qualities emerging that suggested the kind of piety that the editors wanted to promote. These qualities came across as: passion, commitment and humility.”

Jane’s passion also shines through this book, arousing my curiosity in a way that would not have happened if I had just come across the original volumes. The historical context and reflections she includes bring life to the original extracts, and the whole book provides an insight into what it means to be a Quaker, past and present.

“Passion and Partings” is available in each Local Meeting library in Gloucestershire, and Gloucestershire Friends can obtain copies directly from Jane for £5 or online here <http://radiusonline.info/passion-and-partings/>

Alison Crane

Quaker Action on Domestic Abuse (QADA)

Andrea Rigby (Stroud) brings us up-to-date:

Over the summer we have been establishing a network on Facebook for interested Quaker Groups including Friends in Scotland who are active in this matter. We hope that we will be able to build this over the next months as we work towards establishing a Quaker recognised body. Meanwhile we are pursuing opportunities to support young men who have witnessed violence in the home, particularly during the pandemic. We are in contact with the Good Lad Initiative who work with teenage boys to develop positive masculine identities.

We propose a Faith in Action day for Friends to learn about their work. This Ted Talk is a good introduction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dp08bAUwi8>

The Journeyman Theatre have made a video of Rock and a Hard Place available for Meetings to view together via Zoom. We are exploring whether the play could be re-developed so that we have something suitable to use with a younger audience.

We would like to thank Liz Willis for her work on our behalf in support of Stroud Women's Refuge. Chris Lee will take on this role from now. We would be delighted if Friends can support us by buying our Xmas cards to spread the word about the Refuge, and we hope to see many of you at our farmers market stall in Stroud on November 7th and the 28th.

Area Meeting Dates for 2021

February - Saturday 13th

March - Sunday 14th

April - Sunday 11th

June - Sunday 13th

July - Saturday 10th

September - Thursday 9th

October - Sunday 10th

December - Saturday 11th

For the time being, the clerks assume that all these meetings will be online. However, if the Covid situation changes, and face-to-face meetings become possible, we will try to hold "normal" Area Meetings again.

“Life’s necessary Suffering”

I have been struck by the truth that much of life's unnecessary suffering comes when we resist acknowledging life's necessary suffering.

Being human involves suffering. We fail and disappoint others, and ourselves. Others fail us and disappoint us. We hurt and are hurt by people we love. We may have ill health. Eventually we all have to face our own physical death. To deny that we experience suffering is to lose touch with part of our humanity.

In his poem "The Guest House" the 13th century Persian mystic Rumi encourages us to be open, and to learn from our experiences.

"This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honourably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond."

(Translation by Coleman Barks)

Geof Kinns (Forest of Dean)- from *the Forester, Faith in the Forest*



Stroud Women's Refuge Saves Lives

Use your Christmas cards to change lives!

Popular local artist, Alison Vickery, has generously donated three beautiful images for these Christmas cards, which measure 140mm x 140mm, are printed on card from sustainable sources and are supplied in packs of six cards with accompanying white envelopes. The greeting inside reads 'With Christmas and Season's Greetings.'

Every penny of profit from these stylish Christmas cards will go direct to Stroud Women's Refuge to help to fund their life-saving and life-changing work with women victims of domestic abuse/violence and their children.



1 SNOWDROPS



2 SNOWY COTTAGE DOOR



3 HOLLY/CHRISTMAS TREE



ORDER FORM

Cards are supplied with white envelopes and in packs of 6. All the cards in each pack are of the same design. There are no mixed packs. The price is £4 (inc VAT) for a pack of six, plus a flat rate of £2.95 for postage and packing.

Name

Date of order

Delivery address

Design	Number of packs ordered	Price of packs
	<i>There are 6 cards and envelopes in a pack.</i>	<i>£4 inc VAT per pack of 6</i>
1 SNOWDROPS		
2 SNOWY COTTAGE DOOR		
3 HOLLY/CHRISTMAS TREE		
	Subtotal	£
	Add £2.95 postage and packing	£2.95
	TOTAL	£

I enclose a cheque, made payable to 'STROUD WOMEN'S REFUGE' for £
Please post your order and attached cheque to:

Caroline Marrow, 'Inches', 39 Parsonage Street, Dursley, Glos, GL11 4BP

THANK YOU!