

# North East Area Thames NEWSLETTER

November, 2021



Members of NET-AM ride for COP26, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2021

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## Report on Leigh Meeting for Worship

At Leigh we have recently been seeing more members prepared to come to the Meeting House with as many as 18 members attending. Some members are still reluctant to attend or to travel to the Meeting House on a Sunday and are still using zoom. However, as the number of Friends physically attending grows the number online is dwindling.

We have arranged blended Meetings on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> (and 4<sup>th</sup> when there are 5) Sundays in the month. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday we join Maldon Friends online at their blended Meeting. On the last Sunday we join NE Thames online at their blended Meeting at Wanstead. Chelmsford Friends have also invited us to join their blended Meetings.

We have found that it is too complex to have a blended Meeting where Friends are at two Meeting Houses due to the difficulty of identifying who is speaking or clearly hearing any Ministry from Friends either online or at one of the Meeting Houses. This is a limitation of the technology. As a consequence, when we join others who are blended, Leigh Friends are either online or in our Meeting House as two separate groups.

Looking forward, we still find there is likely to be a need for some Friends to attend online, but better equipment, such as a separate microphone may be needed to improve the quality of the online experience. The technology is to some extent intrusive and requires someone to manage it. It is sometimes unreliable and may fail during a Meeting. At Leigh Meeting House, as we have no broadband WiFi service, we are using a mobile data device plugged into a laptop together with a larger screen for blended Meetings.

We have found we can run committee meetings, discussion groups and Meetings for Business quite successfully online but have not attempted to run these as blended meetings.

Jim Grigg  
(Clerk, Leigh on Sea Quakers)  
23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021

## A Quaker view on climate

What does the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) say about climate?

Our faith is based on “*the promptings of love and truth in our hearts*” which we are encouraged to “*trust as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life*”. This is the first advice and query and in essence covers everything. Later in A&Qs we are asked: “*Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?*” (41) A&Q 42 concludes: “*Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God’s continuing creation.*”

Chapter 25 of Quaker Faith and Practice (QF&P) starts with a quotation from John Woolman in 1772: “*The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.*” (25.01). In 1988 the governing body of the time minuted: “*As the Religious Society of Friends we see the stewardship of God’s creation as a major concern. The environmental crisis is at root a spiritual and religious crisis; we are called to look again at the real purpose of being on this earth, which is to till it and keep it to reveal the glory of God for generations to come.*”

In 1982 Damaris Parker-Rhodes wrote: “*Our children are the first generation to grow up facing the possibility of the end of our species.*” (25.03). In 1990 Keith Helmuth wrote: “*.... we are now required to critically assess the market economy and identify it as a false religion, a fabulously productive but ultimately destructive system bringing closure on God’s goodness in creation and bringing a creeping atheism to the soul. To look this system straight in the eye and call it to account is a critical test of Biblical faith.*” (25.14) Finally, Rex Ambler wrote in 1990 that “*the commonwealth of the people and the commonwealth of the earth have become inseparably inter-related and interdependent – have become in fact one new commonwealth of life. Our thinking about God and the world and the way we live in relation to them must now give recognition to that fact.*” (25.15)

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The 2011 Swarthmore lecture, given by Pam Lunn *Costing not less than everything: Sustaining and Spirituality in challenging times*, challenged us by saying: “*We only get one trip to Earth, we only get one life. .... Will we say that we saw the sights and we looked at the scenery, we stared at the natives and used what we wanted for our own pleasure, leaving the place poorer and more polluted than when we arrived? Or will we look back and know that we belonged here, we became part of the community, we contributed to the common good, we made a difference?*”

She quoted Psalm 24: “*The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell within.*” She added the discussion between God and Job from Job 38: “*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Have you ever commanded the morning to appear etc?*” And she challenged us to accept responsibility using Isaiah 6.8: And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” Then I said, “*Here I am! Send me.*” (ESV).

Quaker Yearly Meeting that year made what is known as the Canterbury commitment. AMs were asked to “*consider how truth prospers with regard to sustainability, taking care to relate this to all our testimonies*”; AMs and LMs were encouraged to “*speak truth to power at local level by making relationships with all sections of local communities. .... to encourage positive attitudes to sustainability*”; there was “*a clear call to individual Friends to consider the effects of their lives on the world’s limited resources and in particular on their carbon usage*”. It quoted 1 Corinthians 13 in emphasising that all actions must “*flow nowhere but from love*”; and concluded “*If we are successful. .... we will need to be accountable to one another, but we will also need to be tender with one another, and to support one another through the grief and fear that radical change will provoke.*”

YM 2021 Minute 33 Faith based action for climate justice stated: “*Seeking to reduce carbon emissions is an urgent priority, but without interrogating or disrupting our existing economic systems, this will only lead us back to an unjust system, and may encourage corporations, governments and individuals to delay necessary action and avoid systemic change. Whilst living faithfully, taking practical action to reduce our personal impact on the planet allows us to work in this area with integrity (but) it cannot be where our faith based action ends. Eldership, building resilient communities, right ordering and witness are also fundamental parts of the actions we must take.*”

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Stuart Masters in a blog about James Naylor, asks what to say now: “*Throughout my adult life, I have been aware of the dangers associated with the growing ecological crisis, and of the need for radical change. In response, I have tried to make lifestyle changes. I have altered my diet and means of transportation. I have adjusted my consumption patterns, and tried to “recycle, reuse and reduce”. Occasionally I have taken part in public protests. However, if I am being honest, my relationship with the rest of creation has not been fundamentally transformed, and I remain in thrall to a set of unjust and destructive social, political and economic arrangements. So what is preventing me from making the quantum leap that is so urgently needed?*

*If the Holy Spirit has been poured upon all flesh, and if this Spirit has the power to change my life, what’s going wrong? Why isn’t it happening? After all, the only thing I have to do is surrender. Maybe I’m unwilling to take the plunge because my life is just too comfortable. The life-changing experiences of early Friends occurred within a time of real social turmoil. They had very few man-made structures to fall back on. Stability and comfort were in short supply. This seems to have made it possible for the Spirit to do it’s work, binding people into a powerful new movement for change. Will the growing crisis in our time prompt an even greater and more universal experience of transformation?*

Thomas Penny, in the 2021 Swarthmore lecture, Kinder Ground, spoke about early Friends quoting Ezekiel 33. Penny writes: We are called to be watchmen: to be alert and to witness against the iniquities of the world. We know there is a climate emergency, we know the responsibility for creating it lies with the industrialisation of the world, led by Britain and other countries. We know we have greater means to mitigate the damage. Can we share with Rowan Williams in saying: *Our present ecological crisis, the biggest single threat to our human existence in the middle to long term, has, religious people would say, a great deal to do with our failure to think of the world as existing in relation to the mystery of God, not just some huge warehouse of stuff to be used for our convenience.*

I conclude that our tradition certainly puts climate concern at the centre of our faith and challenges us to do more. We need to ask ourselves whether the more we are asking people to do, an incremental adjustment, will achieve what is necessary. Are we able to attend to what the Spirit is asking and support each other in following it?

Melvyn Freake  
September 2021

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## Preparation for End of Life

As far as possible, make arrangements for your care in good time, so that an undue burden does not fall on others. (A&Q 29)

During my twenty five years of turning up every couple of months to Meeting for Worship at Middlesbrough, I was always heartened by the interest Quakers took in my family. We lived twelve miles from the Meeting House and were isolated from my family by geography, and by circumstance.

For the eldest, this ranged from invitations and transport to a child's party, a Saturday baking event, a teenage Quest weekend at the Meeting House and two Summer Camps at Great Ayton. She had been to Children's Meeting for a few years (every couple of months!) One Friend sent birthday and Christmas cards and presents to all three children. Eventually we developed a shared interest in plants and gardens and I found a way to give back. We collected that Friend every time we went to a new "out of town" supermarket, before she learned to drive. I came to think of Quakers as "adopted relatives".

For some members and attenders, Overseers, and other friends made in the Meeting, become their main, or even only, "family." Opportunities may arise to discuss ways to plan ahead. Some people have strong views on end of life care, treatment, and what should happen to their property and possessions. Others can be encouraged to start thinking about these topics.

On June 16th, some of the Overseers watched a webinar presented by *Compassion in Dying - Supporting Your Choices*.

This is a charity that aims to increase peoples' understanding of the benefits of planning ahead.

The following notes were made by Melvyn Freake at the seminar:

### **Advanced decisions at end of life.**

82% feel strongly but only 4% make advanced wishes about care should they lose capacity.

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### Advanced Decision (Living will)

- Lets you refuse medical treatments
- Must be clear. Needs to specify circumstances and treatments (e.g. CPR, CPAP, clinically assisted nutrition, antibiotics for life-threatening conditions)
- Only kicks in when you lose capacity
- Is legally binding
- Free

### Advanced Statement

- Records your wishes for future care, what you want
- Not legally binding but must be used as a guide
- Include anything important to you and how it affects your care (e.g. lifestyle, beliefs, important people, where to live, etc.)
- Only kicks in when you lose capacity
- free

### Lasting power of attorney (LPA)

- 2 types – health and welfare and finance

#### Health and welfare LPA

- Allows you to nominate person or persons to take decisions for you if you lose capacity (e.g. where you live, daily routine, medical & treatment, people you see & spend time with)
- Choose your attorney carefully
- LPA decisions can be specified as needing to be shared or to be made individually
- Only becomes active when you lose capacity
- Is legally binding
- Costs £82 and takes about 10 weeks to register

Share these forms, once complete, with relatives, close friends, GP surgery (AD hospital and ambulance?)

**Lions Club** have a “message in a bottle scheme” to allow a copy to be kept in the fridge.

- Consider whether to do one only or all three.

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**Compassion in Dying** will supply forms, either online or by post, and give free advice.

- They advise that none of these directions need legal advice.

**Compassion in Dying**, 181 Oxford Street, London, W10 2JT

<https://compassionindying.org.uk>

0800 999 2434

Information line open 11am - 3pm Monday to Friday

[info@compassionindying.org.uk](mailto:info@compassionindying.org.uk)

In July 2021, the government announced it is holding a review of arrangements for power of attorney, the ways of applying for them and their security.

**Overseers** are keen to share the [NET Funeral Wishes form](#)

(<https://nethamesq.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/funeral-wishes-form-quakers-may-2020.doc>) which can be downloaded from this page of the [North East Thames Area Quaker Meeting Website](#) (<https://northeastthamesquakers.org/document-library/>)

This provides a very helpful framework for thinking through arrangements.

You can complete it after discussions with your family, or friends/overseers in the Meeting.

A copy should then be kept in the Overseers files for your meeting (the title “Overseer” may change in the future).

One Friend has told me they have informed their family they want their ashes put into a firework rocket (one of the options these days!) Everyone should meet at a specified place of treasured childhood memories for this Friend. It will be launched from there.

From Advices & queries 29.

*As far as possible, make arrangements for your care in good time, so that an undue burden does not fall on others.*

Christine Downes-Grainger  
(on behalf of NETAM Overseers)  
October 2021

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## Meeting for Sufferings 2nd October 2021

This was the first blended Meeting for Sufferings and seemed to be very successful, enabling about 70 online participants and 40 in person participants to attend.

Apart from the routine business, there were 3 main items that raised serious concerns and discussion. The first and probably the most difficult for Friends to address was the interim report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The final report is expected in 2022 but there are various things we can act on in the meantime. There is a new Safeguarding Policy which outlines requirements on Area Meetings, improvements in record keeping and communication between area meetings and with BYM to ensure national records are maintained. Quaker Life has taken on the responsibility of requesting annual reports from Area Meetings and there is a new Safeguarding Officer, Mark Mitchell, [safe@quaker.org.uk](mailto:safe@quaker.org.uk). We were reminded that Safeguarding is not just about keeping our children safe but all our Members and Attenders and is everyone's responsibility. We should not fall into the trap of believing it could never happen in our Meeting.

The item on the Police and Crime and Sentencing Bill raised very disquieting issues, with one Friend likening the situation we are facing as similar to that in Germany in the 1930s. We were also reminded that the UN have put the UK on their watch list of countries of concern for moving from democratic to authoritarian status. There were contributions on "speaking truth to power" but we should act from our faith. Paul Parker spoke on ways in which Friends at the national and local levels were working with other groups to oppose the Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill, the Lobbying Act, the Elections Bill and the Nationality and Borders Bill. He asked us all to take every opportunity to share our views and beliefs with others who do not agree with us so that we can understand where they are coming from and they can understand our beliefs and actions.

The final item that led to significant discussion was that of the forthcoming COP26 Conference. Many Friends are already involved and there are links in the papers for this meeting on the MfS website.

Staff were asked to draw up a statement to be presented by Paul Parker when he attends in November. The Meeting concluded with reflections from Friends who had attended BYM online. Although Friends missed meeting in person the conclusion was that it had been a very successful event.

Jane Natai October 2021

## Quaker Life Rep. Council – for your comfort and discomfort

“We should not forget that we are all a mixture ... of good and bad, whatever our race, culture, creed or colour.”



This section of Quaker Life Rep Council took place via Zoom in April 2021, whilst the Covid pandemic was still rampant.

There can be no doubt that the title of the session “**For your comfort and discomfort**” gave an interesting counterpoint to an absorbing topic. But this was just the title; the content was emotionally jarring.

Most of us know about slavery which emanated from Africa, and the notorious James Island, and the slave castles. But the names of individuals, both slaves and slave owners (masters?) are for the most part, lost in time. When a well-known name is now linked to slavery, we express shock, ignorance, surprise and sometimes disbelief, that this once “good man’s” name is besmirched with the savagery that is slavery.

There is no doubt that “slavery” has been airbrushed out of our history, and thereby our consciousness, perhaps for our “comfort” and raising this issue, pulling down statues, highlights the “discomfort” we would perhaps have felt if we had really known about slavery, not just the bits that were perhaps thought to be more “acceptable” to us because it involved “the Portuguese” or the Dutch, or the French, with Britain only on the periphery...

How could we, Quakers, have been involved in such an obnoxious trade? Yet we were ...

Aspects of slavery were revealed during this on-line course that I had no idea about:

The fact that reparation was made to “slave owners” to compensate them for the “loss of their slaves”. The cost of this reparation was paid to slave owners and their descendants up until 2015. Yet, no such reparation was made to the slaves themselves.

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Edwina Peart who ran the course covered a very broad range of “discomforting” information, from the young woman who ran off to become a Jihadi Bride and her de-naturalisation – to slavery and the treatment of non-white persons.

We were asked to discuss the 10 point reparation plan (CARICOM). This is worth further investigation and discussion perhaps in individual Meetings.

From a personal perspective, apologising will mean nothing unless we actually demonstrate that going forward things will be different. We cannot change history..... and perhaps what is needed is reconciliation, a coming together of peoples, sharing ideas and experience without rancour in thought or deed which would further impair any prospect of harmony.

We should not forget that we are all a mixture, of good and bad, whatever our race, culture, creed or colour.

Shakespeare once said that the evil that men do lives on after them and the good is interred with their bones. It appears that the reverse happened with slavery.

The second, shorter part of this course was presented by Yvonne Estop Wood, who spoke from personal experience on the issue of transgender people and the difficulties encountered by them. Transgender people have always been part of society, but most of them lived closeted lives, unable to speak of their anxiety or unhappiness. For some conforming to societal norms became a “way of life” for fear of being judged, vilified and excluded.

We need at least to try to broaden our knowledge and understanding of anyone who appears to be different, looking at the similarities rather than the differences.

I am reminded of a song from South Pacific – “You have to be carefully taught”, which is about the early indoctrination of hatred and racism.

We need to look at where our prejudices spring from: when we are born, there is no hate or judgement, just acceptance....

Brenda Phillips  
Leigh Meeting

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## Quaker Witness in East London – what could we be doing?

Friends, we aren't doing at all badly this year, say our treasurers. By the end of 2021 we expect to have put all our myriad local bank accounts into one pot: the Area Meeting account. But here's a bit of number crunching – treasurers and trustees have calculated that only about 35 Friends and attenders make up the bulk of regular financial giving in our local and Area Meeting (if we exclude Leigh Friends, as we must). The big picture is therefore that about three quarters of folk who regard themselves as attached to North East Thames AM and its local meetings give nothing financially towards Quaker work and witness in east London, making ourselves more visible and findable.

### Widening our supporter base...

With more regular funds coming in we could confidently find the annual money we are committed to sending in to LQPT (the centralised Quaker group that is 'still us' that owns and maintains all our meeting houses in the London AMs), and to Britain Yearly Meeting (whose work and witness derives from what the meetings in the UK ask it to do).

We could do a lot more through inspiring new initiatives to build sustainable, thriving and *expanding* Quaker communities which meet and worship together regularly. Maybe guided by some kind of "anti-shrink" committee??

So please help us widen our supporter base (using language unfamiliar to Friends!)

- If you are not already making a small monthly contribution, consider it
- Reflect affectionately on the 100 or so members and regular attenders who are probably *not* contributing and see if there is something that can be done to change this. Without stressing out those who are truly strapped for cash, is there some way of getting a positive message across to our fellow worshippers?
- Discern a costed plan for 2022 to go in your LM draft budget this autumn.

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There's a psychological moment when someone who starts to feel their Quaker meeting is the right place for them to feel at home. You'll spot it – it's when someone talks about “us” and not “you” or “them”. How can their (your?) ministry of presence translate God's work into Quaker-led initiatives that deepen, strengthen and expand the meetings and their witness to the wider world?

Judith Roads  
AM trustee

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An Appreciation of the Life of  
our Friend Audrey Regan,  
1933 – 2020

Many of us over the years have been greeted at Leigh Meeting by our Friend Audrey with her warm and cheerful smile, and felt better for it.

Audrey passed away suddenly on June 12th 2020 aged 86. This was early in the pandemic when mourning together and normal funerals were restricted – yet we remember her with much affection and gratitude for her life with us. She enjoyed people with her ready sense of humour, and took an interest in their lives, through encouragement, support, listening to their problems, and rejoicing in their achievements.

Audrey joined Friends along with her husband Dan, after finding that the Congregational church at Thundersley and Basildon did not provide the spiritual scope for either of them. After moving to Benfleet they joined Canvey Meeting with their young family and found their spiritual home amongst Friends, they joined the Society with little hesitation. The Meeting was small in those days and with the closure of Whittier Hall, where Sunday Meeting was held, the Regans kindly offered their home for Sunday worship. After some time, Canvey Friends joined Leigh Meeting, and over the years Audrey became an active Friend taking on most of the roles of responsibility in Local and Area Meeting. Her ministry was wise and thoughtful, and sometimes challenging. She was not shy of “plain Quaker speaking” if she saw the need, and her views and guidance were clear and helpful in business meetings. She much enjoyed attending Britain Yearly Meeting and the family conferences at High Leigh, with her family and later with her grandchildren, being always ready to join in the fun!

In order to bring up her young family Audrey left her job as a legal secretary to train for a teaching certificate as a mature student, where the school holidays would coincide. She brought her caring and problem solving qualities into the school, classroom and the staffroom, earning her much respect and many good friends.

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Audrey was very courageous in her life often stepping up to the plate in difficult times, and showed a commitment to “championing the underdog”. When a group of Afghan refugee boys were brought to Southend, Audrey and Dan saw this as an opportunity to offer them friendship. They gave the boys practical help, emotional support and confidence to cope in a traumatic time in their lives, and they soon became, and continued to be, family friends. Audrey gave her time and support generously to the Labour Party and Amnesty International, attending conferences and giving talks at meetings, and in schools, reflecting her strong sense of humanity and justice.

After Dan died and her children were independent the move from the larger family home to a smaller bungalow became necessary. It was a very challenging time for her, which she met with her usual courage and determination. She loved the garden in her new home and delighted in growing and tending plants from seeds, especially herbs, and sharing them with family, friends and neighbours.

Audrey was practical and creative, she enjoyed knitting small toys and Christmas decorations for children and charities. She experimented with recipes in the kitchen, cooking delicious vegetarian dishes, which many of us enjoyed. One of her ideas was to have a “Soup Sunday” once a month after Meeting for Worship, particularly for Friends who lived alone, and providing an opportunity for us all to get to know each other better.

Later in her retirement Audrey joined a History of Art and Music class, which was a high point in her week. She was also a member of a local choral society for many years, which provided opportunities for singing trips to Europe, these trips included hard work as well as merry times. Performing in wonderful cathedrals with professional orchestras and soloists was a special thrill for her.

Her diversity of interests and commitments made her an interesting and busy person, yet she never lost sight of the support she could offer to her friends and acquaintances, be they near or far, reminding us of the importance of our own lives. Welcoming folk into her home and providing hospitality, for coffee mornings, social gatherings, and meetings, was again a way Audrey saw for the enriching of communication in a happy atmosphere. She was devoted to her family, her three children, and her growing grandchildren, having family gatherings whenever possible.

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Later in her life she felt she could no longer accept the Christian philosophy, feeling more comfortable with Quaker non-theist views. She attended several conferences of the Non-theist Friends Network and served on their steering group. Quakerism was always at her heart, and she continued her work and involvement with Friends: our quiet hour on Sunday mornings meant so much to her.

I think the most effective way in which we give to the world is by truly being ourselves. Audrey did this completely. She was true to herself and her values. Her warmth, friendliness and mischievous sense of fun made the person that she was so accessible to others. She touched many people's lives in big ways and small ways, a real example of a life well lived.

Leigh-on-Sea Friends  
September 2021

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## Walthamstow Children's Meeting



Our Children's Meeting has continued to meet every 2nd and 4th Sunday morning with up to 5 children from 3 families attending regularly. During lockdown we met on line but it was a relief when the better weather came and we were able to meet up in the park.

Our activities included planting bulbs, painting small baskets and drawing pictures on the cards to send to Alok Sharma before Cop26. One of our most successful sessions was when Sebastian, a goat, joined us on Zoom on 28<sup>th</sup> February.

Jane Natai  
November 2021