

wsqn

- connecting local meetings



August 2023

West Scotland Quaker Newsletter August 2023

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Frontispiece: photo by Bryan Bowes.

Living creatures are in perpetual dialogue with all that surrounds them – with the other creatures that they encounter minutes by minute, and with climate and landscape; which means that they are in perpetual dialogue with the whole world, which in turn is subject to the influence of the whole universe. Whatever other creatures may do however the world changes, each individual must take everything else into account.

Each of us is engaged in this dialogue with other creatures and with the universe at large from conception to the grave. Furthermore, what applies to individuals also applies to whole lineages of living creatures, as they evolve over time: all lineages of living creatures, whether oaks or dogs or human beings, are engaged in this dialogue from inception to extinction.

All creatures might in principle be able to evolve in an infinite number of ways as Darwin suggested. But if they are to survive along the way then each must solve the particular problems of its own environment at all times – and to each problem there is a limited number of solutions.

There is something about the universe, at least as it is manifest on earth, that seemed to demand the emergence of fish and trees (and perhaps – who knows? – of human intelligence). The physicist David Bohm spoke of ‘implicit order’ of the universe. Fish, like trees, (and human intelligence) reflect this innate, implicit orderliness. They are its manifestations.

From The Secret Life of Trees Colin Trudge

A Report of West Scotland Area Meeting held 23rd April

Claire Phillips, Castle Douglas

It felt good to arrive at comfortable, well equipped Cumberland Day Centre and be welcomed by Dumfries Friends for a blended Area Meeting on a warm spring day. Here in Dumfries and Galloway, our three LMs take turns to host AM and after the disruption of the last two years it had been quite a while since we'd gathered locally along with folk from the rest of West Scotland.

After the joy of greeting one another in person, grabbing a coffee (plus a biscuit and a sweetie!) a report from the Options for Scotland working group focussed my attention on the agenda. I'm not going to say much more about that as it's well covered elsewhere but I will say this. I was delighted to hear from the Clerk of that group that the move to one charity for the whole of Scotland had emerged as a possible outcome. Since reviews and reforms of various aspects of our Quaker organisation have been going on across BYM there's been a lot of talk about what counts as 'simpler'. Surely one thing must be to have fewer bodies and more clarity about what they do. But then there's how they fit together.....

Scanning our AM Clerk's draft minutes in the time running up to the start of opening worship I noticed the acknowledgement of the death of Patrick Bealey and realised I'd missed seeing it when I'd read the papers earlier. Patrick had been our clerk and an elder in Castle Douglas for several years before he moved down to Portsmouth to be close to his family. He was a caring, gentle yet passionate presence in our Local Meeting who 'trod lightly on the Earth' to quote the ministry of another Castle Douglas member when we got to that item. I try to follow his example and often find myself wanting.

The AM Clerk and assistant Clerk worked hard to have the video conferencing equipment work well for those in the room and at a distance. It was tricky and there were a few hold ups. I felt for them, especially with their added task of discerning the will of the Meeting and rendering it into minutes.

But I also felt for the Friends in the various places around our huge West Scotland geographical area who were trying to be fully present. For the sake of the planet and those of us who are less mobile we will continue to use technology. I pray that more spiritually grounded ways of gathering online, in person and as a blended gathering will emerge as we get used to it.

I bought a third hand electric car last summer – I had never even driven an automatic! At first I was terrified and to my shame got the shiny new car stuck in our garage not once but twice(!) resulting in some expensive body work. But now I move between EV, diesel (as little as I can), automatic drive and stick shift (as our US cousins call it) with ease and confidence. And I use the train or bus routinely, especially for any journey over 40 miles. We will adapt and change. Younger Friends

will (we hope) look back from the future and say ‘remember when....’ or ‘what was that all about?’

Report for Area Meeting 5th June

Jenny Copsey, Milngavie

A great time for reflection and learning. This was the first time I have attended an AM for the West of Scotland and it turned out to be of interest and stimulating from start to finish. The common theme being truth and our interrelatedness and interdependence as human beings in and on our natural world and the societies in which we live. How we can live sustainably and with love.

Truth to Power was spoken about by Willoughby Densham with such passion and enthusiasm, I hope his influence will be far reaching. He was describing the two young people’s events (Senior Conference ‘22 and JYM ‘23) that he attended over the past 12 months, where they listened and explored the complexities of finding and speaking to the truth in our immediate society and the wider world. How can we do this with love when the distribution of power is so clearly discriminatory and prejudicial? The marginalisation of minority groups was introduced through a subjective lens to the young people, giving them time to work out for themselves how it would feel to be one of the discriminated against. I put myself through this process and I remembered occasions when that sense of impotence has generated fear and hurt, and was reminded how easily these emotions can lead to explosive disaffection or self-deprecating thoughts and moods. We need so much more of the experience these young people at Quaker gatherings were given, to be introduced into our regular education system. I was reminded of the good work that Restorative Justice can do in schools and community settings when I heard Willoughby describing the discussion they had about non-violent communication. Parliamentary discussion could improve from such learning too! The overriding impression I was given by Willoughby was the learning, friendship and fun enjoyed during their meetings, became the stimulus for great soul searching in a loving milieu – an example for us all.

It is unnecessary to draw the parallel with the following AM discussion about the proposals for adding a 5th Amendment to the Rome Statute, but truth to power is definitely required in this regard – let’s get on with it. Our support is urgently needed and just as the young people are fired up to address marginalisation and poverty in society, we need to do all we can to spread the messages of David George’s film “Why on Earth isn’t Ecocide Illegal?”. With such statistics as “100 companies are responsible for 75% of Global Warming”; and “54,000 species have been lost in the past year”; the urgency is stark. I liked Maureen Anderson’s suggestion that our Testimony to Sustainability could be changed to a Testimony to Reverence for the Earth. This mirrors the theme of 25.15 QF&P that we heard at the

beginning of AM – to tread lightly on the world is our common responsibility. We need to do our best individually and as an organization.

I am on the train as I write this, travelling through the gentle hills of the West Country, going back home after some time away, and I am reminded that I want all those young people I've been with, to have a future. I was lucky enough to have a childhood of freedom and opportunity in a beautiful world, let's make it possible for them too. I know I am preaching to the converted but let's convert a whole lot more people into thinking about why and how we are living in the world, and how much longer we can.

Compare . . .

Advice & Queries 2007

34. Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.

35. Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply. Ask your meeting for the prayerful support which will give you strength as a right way becomes clear.

36. Do you uphold those who are acting under concern, even if their way is not yours? Can you lay aside your own wishes and prejudices while seeking with others to find God's will for them?

Advices and Queries 1964

Remember your responsibilities as citizens for the government of your own town and country, and do not shirk the effort and time this may demand. Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear; and try to discern the new growing-points in social and economic life. Work for an order of society which will allow men and women to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.

GENERAL MEETING FOR SCOTLAND

Quaker Truth and Integrity Group (QTIG) PAPER C

The Quaker Truth and Integrity Group (QTIG) aims to promote the place of truth and integrity in the public discourse; to discern what role Quakers might have to play in this, either independently or working with other groups/bodies; and to draw the attention of Friends and others to the depth of the problems we face and ways in which they can be countered, for example through interviews with well-informed individuals.

QTIG began as an informal group of Quakers sharing a deeply felt concern about the state of truth and integrity in public life in Britain. In March 2022 it gained official recognition by the national Quaker body (Britain Yearly Meeting) as a “Quaker Recognised Body”.

QTIG and Friends in Scotland

Martina Weitsch, of the QTIG steering group, is inviting us to consider how Friends in Scotland can be engaged in the work of QTIG, the principles of which underpin much of what Friends stand for in public life.

For those wishing to dig deeper beforehand, there are a couple of texts from Yearly Meeting 2023 which you can access -

The introduction to the YM 2023 preparatory session, click on this link:

<https://quakertruth.org/ym-preparatory-session-2023/>

The introduction to the item in YM session, click on this link:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/diane-randall-truth-and-integrity-introduction-yearly-meeting-2023>

Background

The following statement was adopted by QTIG on 3 October 2022.

Declaration

Truth and Integrity: Finding Common Ground

Truth and integrity have been at the heart of the Quaker movement for over three hundred and fifty years. We were once called Friends of the Truth, and have a tradition of speaking truth to power and exercising quiet diplomacy. Whilst our record is not flawless, historically we have stood firm in relation to the abolition of slavery, prison reform and conscientious objection.

As people of faith we seek a world transformed, where compassion, equality, truth and integrity are guiding principles. In the meantime, our belief in equality and the intrinsic worth of each individual means that we value democracy as a form of government. Just as we wish our children and grandchildren to inherit the beautiful planet we have experienced, so we want them to enjoy the benefits of a mature democracy where truth prospers and the rule of law applies. Governing with truth and integrity is essential for generating trust; when that trust breaks down people

become disillusioned, and leaders lose their mandate to govern.

At the core of Quakerism we experience a sense of oneness, wonder and mystery. That universal sense provides the basis for the cooperation so urgently needed in our troubled world. We seek kinder ground: the ground of tolerance, respect, mutual cooperation and shared ethical and spiritual values, where oppression can be addressed and reconciliation sought between those of opposing views. We know that this vision is shared by many other individuals and groups, of all faiths and none.

The world has entered a deeply troubling phase. Standards of truth and integrity in politics, public and commercial life and social media are being undermined to the extent that democracy itself is under threat. Many of those in power would seem to act with impunity, disregarding facts and scientific findings. Respect for the judiciary is being undermined and trust in our institutions is threatened. All this is set against a backdrop of the climate emergency and increasing inequality and polarisation.

It was in response to this need that the Quaker Truth & Integrity Group was set up as a national Quaker body in Britain in March 2022. QTIG has committed itself to:

- upholding standards of honesty and integrity in our lives and organisations;
- acknowledging that the majority of those in public life/politics are people of goodwill and finding ways of working respectfully with them on 'kinder ground';
- helping to ensure the Nolan principles (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership)[1] continue to govern public life;
- working towards a system of truly inclusive, participative democracy, where people feel their wishes and needs are truly respected and taken into account;
- encouraging constitutional reform and strengthening systems of accountability;
- promoting higher standards of truth within the media, including social media.

With these objectives in mind, we intend to institute a national Quaker Truth & Integrity Award to recognise exceptional contributions towards the enhancement of standards of truth and integrity in public life.

In a society in which lies, injustice, inequality, deception and entitlement are prevalent it is only the truth – in all its uncomfortable forms – that will heal us. Where truth and integrity flourish, so too can personal relationships. Where truth and integrity stand firm, so too can our democracy and our precious traditions. Unless truth and integrity are universally acknowledged and practised, at a fundamental level, international relations cannot fully and completely address the crises that threaten our very existence.

We invite others to join us in this endeavour. We are looking to find partners, people all across the political spectrum who are of good faith and goodwill, so that we can engage together in this urgent and vital work of transformation. Can we

work together?

We are not for names, nor men, nor titles of Government, nor are we for this party nor against the other ... but we are for justice and mercy and truth and peace and true freedom, that these may be exalted in our nation, and that goodness, righteousness, meekness, temperance, peace and unity with God, and with one another, that these things may abound. Edward Burrough, 1659

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>.

23/06/11 Options for Scotland from GM minutes

Further to minute 23/03/18, we receive the report of the Options for Scotland 2 Working Group. This has been before all four Area Meetings in Scotland, and we receive their minutes as follows:

- 035/23 of West Scotland AM held 15 April 2023;
- 15/23 of North Scotland AM held 22 April 2023;
- 2023/05/05 of South East Scotland AM held 9 May 2023;
- 23.05.03 of East Scotland AM held 13 May 2023.

Copies of these minutes and the introductory paper from the Options 2 Group are filed with our minutes.

The recommendations from Options 2 Group both to Area Meetings and to General Meeting for Scotland are that:

- We form a single body, 'Quakers in Scotland' through which we support all our Local Meetings, where our membership is held and which enables us to speak, as Quakers, on Scotland wide issues.
- We form a single charity (a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), to be responsible for the stewardship of all our resources across Scotland.
- We develop further the use of paid professional support to undertake routine tasks and provide advice, easing the load for the Friends we ask to give the greatest practical ministry.

We have noted the area meeting minutes and observe that all understand the need for change. We have heard of the pain caused to some by our process in forming the working group. Also concern about what happens to existing area meetings, and disquiet about some of the implications and nature of the recommendations. In particular, how we maintain our communities of faith and witness, especially through our systems of eldership and pastoral care. We have been reminded of the need for a wider support in maintaining properties, and we have heard of the opportunity to do some things differently. We find we are not in unity over the recommendations at this point but recognise the need to explore further the issues raised today, and in the area meeting minutes. One Friend expressed how we

wrestle with the words “faith, trust, hope, realism and practicalities” in relation to the issues before us. We are aware of the real and current difficulties facing us all in maintaining existing structures and of the responsibilities we have for each other. We also need to be clear of how the role of General Meeting, as defined in 5.03 of *Quaker faith & practice*, is maintained.

Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG)

Report to GM June 2023

There are 3 main positive areas of work and progress on which we’d like to report.

1 Parliamentary Engagement Officer (PEO): We’re very happy to report that BYM have appointed a new PEO, who will start work with us on 11 July. Sarah Komashko lives in Edinburgh and her career to this point has been in (Scottish) law; but she also has some direct parliamentary engagement experience with the European Parliament, and advocacy experience in Scotland working with councillors on behalf of a climate charity for whom she was trustee and then treasurer. When we (David Loxton, Grace Da Costa, Robin Waterston and Carolyn Burch) interviewed Sarah we all sensed she would handle the PEO role very well and the group are looking forward very much to having her in post. We hope to welcome her to a GM in the near future. Of course, we now have a new Scottish government leadership in place and as the new PEO settles in we will focus together on renewing existing relationships and reaching out for new ones to continue our work.

2 Peace at the Heart – two Parliamentary events and a travelling exhibition: Plans are making good progress for our two events at the Parliament in September. The Peace Education Exhibition (26th to 28th September), based on the “Peace at the Heart” report launched by BYM last year; plus on 21st September – International Peace Day! - a music and storytelling performance by a Glasgow primary school class, directed by our very own Children and Young People’s Advocate support, Mary Troup (WSAM).

The two events have a new sponsoring MSP. Michelle Thomson (SNP Falkirk East). Paul McLennan was unable to remain as our Sponsor after he was made Minister for Housing. But it is PEWG’s intention to stay in Friendly touch with Paul and link him up with Quaker Housing Trust at the earliest opportunity – a nice engagement opportunity for our new PEO!

Zoe Prosser, our Local Development Worker, is coordinating the ‘tour’ of the exhibition before and after its appearance in the Parliament. Please do contact her if your meeting can offer a venue. It looks hopeful that it will be hosted in at least one location in each area meeting but Zoe is open to offers!

3 Responding to the Scottish government’s Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan. This 50-question consultation was our major piece of advocacy work over March and April. Key issues were to encourage the government to state an unambiguous presumption against new oil & gas exploration and development;

to focus urgent public investment on proven renewables in preference to carbon capture and storage, and to be truthful about related issues – for example, the limitations of hydrogen as an energy source. Our response was prefaced by an explanation of how our work – including this response – is grounded in the Quaker testimonies. This statement has been offered to Friends as an opportunity for witness whether in local discussion or in communication with their MSPs.

We've also been taking part in Stop Climate Chaos's group work (international group; policy and advocacy group), and in the drawing up of their new 'Manifesto', making contributions about Loss and Damage funding and the links between climate breakdown and the need for a humane approach to migration – tying in with current priorities for QPSW and QCEA (Quaker Council for European Affairs). Thanks to Grace Da Costa for her help in covering these meetings.

Plus ... Time for Reflection: It was so heartwarming to see Lesley Morrison speaking in the Parliament on 25 April on 'Are we being good ancestors?' You can watch it here. Further submissions are in the pipeline – thanks to all who have come forward.

Carolyn Burch and Richard Raggett

Nominations

Nominations Committee has reported that it has started to work through the appointments list so that we can have all positions filled for the start of 2024. We encourage Friends to put their names forward or suggest suitable names. A revision to the leaflet "*Seeking Nominations*" with a corrected email contact address was attached to the papers accompanying the agenda for this meeting.

Living the Spirit of Ubuntu

World Plenary Meeting

The World Plenary Meeting will take place in Johannesburg in 2024. The theme of this and of World Quaker Day on 1st October will be Living in the Spirit of Ubuntu: responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation and one another.

Below is the 10 point guide from the Epistle of SAYM Gathering 2023:

1. The term ubuntu refers to the deeply held belief, morality and custom, that every person is worthy of being recognised, respected and heard, and that we as human beings are all interdependent.

2. Ubuntu is found as a daily practice in many African societies, though terms, languages and nuances may differ. The effect of ubuntu is to maintain cohesion, balance, openness, peace, compassion and dignity in a community. It restrains self-serving and materialism. It ensures that strangers are welcome.
3. Ubuntu also implies a collective responsibility to ensure that all members of the community have the means of subsistence and learning, of participation in communal decision-making and rites of passage. Elders have a responsibility to resolve conflicts.
4. Ubuntu further extends to care for the environment, since people are part of the same God-given creation, that is an interdependent whole.
5. The priority for humanity expressed as ubuntu is an ancient wisdom. It has been asserted in more recent times in the process of liberation from colonialism and apartheid. Christian anti-apartheid leader Desmond Tutu explained ubuntu with the words, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, with yours.'
6. Ubuntu is now being taken up in law in South Africa, Uganda and Lesotho. The four principles of ubuntu can be considered as community, interdependence, solidarity and dignity.
7. Ubuntu resonates with the Quaker belief that all are equal. Our duty to care for one another was expressed by Isaac Pennington in 1667, 'Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness, and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another, but praying for one another, and helping one another with a tender hand.'
8. A number of biblical passages have been found to be relevant to the concept of ubuntu, including 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 14-27 ('now the body is not made up of one part but many . . . If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it')
9. In seeking to apply ubuntu, Southern African Friends are looking to engage in activities concerning a universal basic income grant, clean energy production, food security, alternatives to violence, and overcoming/forgiving past atrocities.
10. 'The Spirit of ubuntu lives!' (Epistle from SAYM Gathering 2023).

Book of Discipline Revision Committee - July 2023

committee meeting

Mary Woodward

Your committee met at Woodbrooke for the last time over the weekend of 14-16 July 2023. We were delighted to be together again, and achieved an impressive amount of work – all tinged with the sadness of having to say goodbye to a beloved place which has played such an important part in our work so far.

One of our number was prevented by ill health from joining us, and another joined us on line. Paul Parker, our Recording Clerk, was with us for the whole weekend, meaning he got a very good idea of how we are progressing and was able to offer advice and information where appropriate. It was particularly good to be reassured that we are making good progress: it's very easy to lose sight of the overall picture when you're deeply embroiled in a particular topic's complexities.

Our agenda included plenty of time for us to share how we are, or are not, coping with our current workload. We revisited our decision last year to appoint named pastoral friends and our nominating group was asked to find three names, one each to be appointed for one, two, and three years, in addition to discerning names for other committee appointments.

We spent a lot of time sharing our experiences of, and learnings from, the feedback we have received on our draft Nominations and Marriage texts. The feedback received was around 168xA4 pages, some from individuals, some from e.g. local or area meetings. Others reported on Friends' contributions during 'visits' by members of the committee, or in conversation. While we are keen to ensure that Friends are aware of our work, we also need to be very specific about what sort of feedback we are asking for, and what we hope to learn from it.

Much of the feedback was positive, confirming that the work needs to be done and we are working along the right lines: of course, there was some criticism, too, sometimes rather forcefully expressed. Some Friends voiced a concern that the words of the Marriage Declaration currently make no provision for people who would prefer not to use 'god language'. This matter is not within our remit, and we agreed to pass this matter to Meeting for Sufferings for their consideration.

Friends' feedback will be taken on board as we continue our work, as is that from individual committee members assigned as 'readers' for topic papers which have reached the point where an 'outside eye' can give valuable assistance. We considered a large number of papers over this weekend. Some are works in progress, some possibly nearing completion and ready to be 'banked' for now. Three which had been written in the committee's early days, had needed the attention of a reader because the groups that had worked on them had been laid down,.

On a personal note, I and the other members of the writing group were greatly heartened at the very positive response to our paper on Worship. We were so close to the paper, and we had done so much intensive work immediately before the committee weekend, that we couldn't see the overall shape of the piece. It was a relief to hear real appreciation of our text and the fact that it includes a large amount of narrative/ explanatory text surrounding the extracts we had chosen. It was also greatly heartening to be told that the piece only needed small 'tweaks' then could be banked

Other papers were also deemed ready or virtually ready to be banked: others, begun more recently, were proffered by their writing groups to check that they were on the right lines, and/ or whether anything crucial was missing. Three new topics had writers and readers assigned to them: Faithful Lives, Personal Journeys, and Funerals. I was delighted to join the last-named group, and have the opportunity to work on a fairly self-contained and uncontroversial topic with two committee members with whom I've not previously worked.

New groups were also set up to work on our very early text on Spiritual and Pastoral Care; to develop our work on Diversity and Inclusion into a separate piece of text. Another group will think about how we include 'anthology material' [extracts from others' writings] that is not contained in the main narrative text of our book [especially the church government sections] but which needs to be present to indicate the deep richness of our written heritage and more recent writing of which many Friends may be unaware. We have also set up a group to start looking at how we might approach creating the overall structure of our book, to help us when we reach the stage of 'opening the box' of banked texts and seeing how they might fit together.

Your committee also looked at the timeline we agreed last year. We were greatly heartened to see that we are further ahead with some of our work than the plan had suggested. However, our work is also pointing out things we didn't include in the plan, like further developing early texts and adding new topics to our list as they become apparent. The group working on diversity and inclusion within the whole book have realised that there needs to be a discrete text on this subject. We will also need to work more on Advices & Queries once our draft text nears completion.

Paul Parker's emphasising "*proximity to points of no return*" was extremely helpful. Our timeline has important points which impinge on the work of other parts of Yearly Meeting – dates by which certain parts of our work have to be completed if they are to be able to be presented to Yearly Meeting as a whole. We have to take into account when and how we are going to need help from Friends House staff and how this will fit into the timetable of all the other work they do. We also need to work closely with Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee – not least in agreeing 'who does what' when we prepare to share our final draft with the Yearly Meeting. Paul was able to assure us that, because our work requires this, we would be given

permission to have two in person committee meetings next year, and should also ask to do this in subsequent years.

It was becoming very clear that the work doesn't stop once the initial draft-writing nears completion. There are so many other things to consider: one committee member commented that we have had a very relaxed few years and that the next few may well get more intense. It was thought that the committee might take a temporary break from formal 'visits' to LMs, AMs and other interested groups, though we would continue to run sessions at Yearly Meeting, and individual members could continue with ad hoc sessions where they felt able.

We need to continue taking care of ourselves and each other, and of the committee as a whole. Individuals might have to consider asking for temporary release from other service, or delay taking on anything new. I was feeling slightly apprehensive about this potentially increased work load, and was greatly heartened when our co-clerk, Rosie Carnall, said "*I back us to do this... we've got this, Friends, we just need to stay the course*".

Many of us had arrived at Woodbrooke feeling somewhat overburdened and even disheartened about our work. Being together again has re-energised us and given us the strength and inspiration to continue our task. We look forward to meeting again in October at the University of Warwick.

Once again, Friends, please continue to uphold us – we cannot do this work alone: we rely on you to help and support us.

Our key messages:

1 We have spent time reviewing the responses from Friends to the draft texts of 2 topics for the new book (Marriage, and Nominations) that we had shared. We are grateful for what we have learned from this feedback which will now inform our work going forward.

2 We have sent a minute to Meeting for Sufferings regarding changes to the marriage declaration suggested in this feedback that are beyond the remit of our Committee.

3 Consideration continues regarding how we make our book accessible and inclusive: planning for multiple accessible formats; making it clear when quotations are introduced; including useful cross-referencing; and ensuring that a sufficient inclusivity and diversity of Quaker voices across Britain are included in the final version.

4 We have reviewed our progress in relation to our overall project plan that aims to offer a complete first full draft of the new book to Yearly Meeting 2027, and are pleased that we remain on track.

Interfaith Glasgow AGM and launch of Creating Brave Spaces Resource 6th July 2023

Derek Read, Glasgow

Three Friends attended this well supported event on a dreich wet evening at Interfaith Glasgow HQ in Springburn. We were served a welcome cuppa and thereafter some delicious and varied food from different cuisines before the business commenced.

This internationally recognised and acclaimed organisation has had one of “its most successful, action packed year to date and many events celebrating with people from across Glasgow’s diverse communities and been able to interact in person following the isolation of the pandemic.”

It saw the reopening of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art after a campaign led by Interfaith Glasgow.

They adopted their first Strategic Plan focused on developing Interfaith understanding solidarity and cooperation in climate justice and addressing the needs of vulnerable communities, especially refugees and those experiencing food insecurity. Creating respectful listening-focused interfaith conversations about topical issues that matter to people. They had a best ever year for grant funding receiving support for the their biggest and most vibrant One Big Picnic . The picnic is an opportunity to bring refugee families together. Continuing work with much valued volunteers Work on Climate justice. Appeals included raising over£2000 for Christmas gifts for the refugee families attending the innovative Weekend Club for refugee families

However in January 2023 Interfaith Glasgow received the devastating news that Glasgow City Council - as a result of huge demand on the Glasgow Community Fund - would not renewing funding from April 2023.This funding represented more than half of Interfaith Glasgow’s annual income consequently the organisation is facing significant financial shortfall and the future of highly successful programmes such as the Weekend Club and the Interfaith Food Justice Network hang in the balance

Interfaith Glasgow are continuing to search for alternative sources of funding for the coming year and beyond and recently held a sponsored climb of Ben Ann which raised over £5000. The organisation has been greatly encouraged by the generous response of supporters (Including Glasgow Quakers) who share the belief that in testing economic times fostering positive relationships between diverse communities is not a luxury but a necessity

Creating Brave Spaces

The evening also saw the launch of this new project “Creating Brave Spaces-learnings from a Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Antisemitism “ The Executive Summary asks the question: “How can we engage in better dialogue about issues that affects us deeply, with people whom we might profoundly disagree ?”

The resource was developed as experimental dialogue between a dozen participants- of Jews and Christians- coming together repeatedly over two and a half years and then working together to compile their collective learning. Their dialogues explored the nature of antisemitism and how it relates to criticism of the state of Israel. This topic has become one of the thorniest in the public sphere and is often the 'the elephant in the room' in interfaith contexts and other settings where the emphasis is on good relations.

The steering group of representatives from Interfaith Glasgow and the West Scotland Council of Christians and Jews hoped to create a 'brave space'- a phrase which builds on the more commonly used idea of a 'safe space'. This 'brave space' was one where participants were invited to accept the discomfort and risk involved asking difficult questions, speaking honestly and listening attentively even though this might be painful.

The resource includes reflections from both participants and facilitators about what aided discussion and pitfalls to avoid and a sample dialogue plan. It aims to be a resource for any group seeking to engage in discussion of some of the more difficult issues of our times as well as being helpful, more generally with respect to any kind of dialogue.

After the formal business of the AGM the two facilitators of the project introduced some of the exercises they had used in building up the participants including one of deep listening which reminded me of the work of Rachel Pinney the Quaker peace activist and author of Creative Listening. The exercises started lighthearted and ended with a listening exercise. The resource will be of interest as a tool in conflict resolution

Interfaith Glasgow is going through a difficult period and needs our support prayers and fundraising They are a very resilient and innovative organisation and led by enthusiastic professional staff and board. They also are very good at building loyalty.

A number of former staff members are now serving on the Board of Directors. The long-standing Chairman Philip Mendelssohn and Treasurer Anthony Allison stood down to be replaced by new members. Philip was presented with a lovely apple tree which he said he would plant but leave the nurturing to his wife Philip not being known for his gardening skills! However judging by warm and friendly atmosphere and interest in the welfare of the organisation the tree of Interfaith Glasgow has a lot more growing to do yet.

Copies of "Creating Brave Spaces" will be available in the Library in the Meeting House. Further copies can be purchased from Interfaith Glasgow for £5.

Donations to Interfaith can be via the website www.interfaithglasgow.org or support IG by shopping on line through easyfundraising.

Derek Read and Liz Anderton Ecumenical and Interfaith representatives

Quaker Concerns

Scottish Quaker Community Justice Network

Report to Justice Interest Group/ Quakers in Criminal Justice for 23rd June 2023

From: Mike Nellis, Scottish rep on the Justice Interest Group/QICJ

The Scottish Quaker Community Justice Network (SQCJN) was re-convened in 2021 – an earlier iteration of it having lapsed - with approximately 17 members from across Scotland, although not all four Area meetings are yet represented. A Working Group of five members drawn from the Network have been appointed as a “nominated group” by General Meeting (GM) and they are authorised to speak publicly on community justice issues, to respond to relevant Scottish Government consultations and to engage with other institutions as need arises. Several consultations – notably on the future of criminal justice social work, and the proposed Community Justice Scotland strategy document - have been responded to, often in conjunction with GM’s Parliamentary Engagement Officer. The SQCJN as a whole has only ever met on Zoom, usually monthly, for 90 minutes or so each time, sometimes with an external speaker, often just talking among ourselves around our respective interests and discoveries, our contacts with third sector organisations in the community justice field, or addressing a pre-set agenda.

In consultation with the Network, the Working Group drew up a Position Statement which was adopted by General Meeting in March 2022. The Statement is largely based on the Minute from Canadian YM in 1981 in which the abolition of prisons is described as a ‘process and a long term goal’. Our statement highlights how the roots of crime lie in the violence and inequality in our society and how the overuse of prisons as a response to crime is a destructive and expensive failure. We nonetheless stopped short of calling for prison abolition, but there has been a general openness in the Network – a few of whose members are abolitionists - to reflecting on what this might or should entail. The Working Group subsequently organised discussion sessions for Friends in Area Meetings on our Statement and the Canadian Minute. One of these sessions was summarised thus in the relevant Area Meeting report thus:

[After a short quiz on aspects of Scottish penal issues] we ... went into small groups and considered how we can help reduce the overuse of prisons and achieve justice by fostering peace and inclusion, and whether we should consider in future adopting a minute leading towards prison abolition. Most people in my group agreed that there needs to be a change of ethos within the prison service away from containment towards

rehabilitation, following the Scandinavian model. Maybe we should bring the statistics from Finland and other countries to the attention of Scottish politicians. Some felt the word 'abolition' might be misunderstood as simply opening the prison gates, rather than establishing a different more humane, therapeutic alternative – perhaps another word could be used?

In March 2022 an appointed sub-group from the Network organised an in-person/hybrid "reflection day" (workshop), open to Friends and others on "Trauma, Justice and Imprisonment". Speakers from the Network spoke on experiences of responding to trauma, restorative justice, AVP, HMP Dovegate's therapeutic community, involvement in penal reform and becoming abolitionists. A young man spoke of his own traumatising experience in his family and in prison, becoming a Christian, and of the work he now does with young people who offend, who are often so traumatised that they do not know how to make changes when they leave prison. A booklet resulted from this event, *Breaking the Chains and Building Change*, designed by a Network member with considerable design talents. <https://bit.ly/breakingchainsbuildingchange>

Unlike England and Wales, there is no formal arrangement for appointing Quaker Prison Chaplains to Scottish prison chaplaincy teams. Many discussions have taken place over the years with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) with a view to altering this, but to no avail. Nonetheless, individual Quakers have periodically worked in prisons on a grace and favour basis when individual chaplains have been approached. One such, who is a member of the Network and the Working Group, described her involvement thus:

About 5 years ago while in the Scottish Borders I became the Area Meeting Quaker Chaplaincy representative for HMP Edinburgh. After some initial difficulties in gaining access to the prison a new Church of Scotland Minister became the fulltime Chaplain there and he made me welcome and facilitated my starting a Quaker Meeting for Creative Listening and Worship with five of the long term prisoners. I also visited three prisoners individually who requested this.

The Working Group has continued to explore the question of QPM's with SPS. One result of that ongoing dialogue has been a recognition that in their places of work SPS chaplains are not well supported. Reflecting on that, in May 2023, the Working Group organised "Time for Self and Soul Care", a day-long (11am-3pm), in-person retreat, for them at Glasgow Meeting House. 22 chaplains attended. One of the days's organisers wrote:

"Throughout we felt a sense of engagement and a thirst to spend time in silence and reflection. We had prepared a

program in which - next to silent worship - creative listening and communication had a role to play.”

The evaluation forms indicated a need for this type of meeting for SPS chaplains. Their answers included: 'so valuable'. “very precious time” meeting others” ...”space and silence” “ everyone got an equal chance to speak” “informative and enriching”. “opportunity to share”. We may repeat this work.

The SQCJN and its Working Group are pleased with what has been accomplished so far, remains in a good place and looks forward to its future engagements.

Peace and Justice

As you probably know, the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group, along with QPSW colleagues and our YP Coordinator Mary Troup, have been working to organise two ‘Peace at the Heart’ events at the Scottish Parliament in **September** - a children's music performance on **21st** and an exhibition **26-28th**. The official invitation to MSPs is being sent this month direct from the office of the sponsoring MSP Michelle Thomson, but we can all encourage our MSPs to accept the invitations! If you would like to do this, you may like to use the draft note attached; you can check who your constituency and list MSPs are, on the writetothem.com website

If one or more of your MSPs signed Paul McLennan’s motion in support of the Peace at the Heart report, you might like to start your note with, e.g. “I was very glad that you signed Motion S6M-04587 in June 2022 in support of British Quakers 'Peace at the Heart' report.”

The following is a list of those who signed the motion. Karen Adam, Clare Adamson, Colin Beattie, Neil Bibby, Miles Briggs, Ariane Burgess, Stephanie Callaghan, Donald Cameron, Maggie Chapman, Foysol Choudhury, Alex Cole-Hamilton, Annabelle Ewing, Meghan Gallacher, Rhoda Grant, Ross Greer, Daniel Johnson, Bill Kidd, Monica Lennon, Douglas Lumsden, Michael Marra, John Mason, Liam McArthur, Stuart McMillan, Marie McNair, Jenni Minto, Oliver Mundell, Willie Rennie, Emma Roddick, Douglas Ross, Mark Ruskell, Paul Sweeney, Evelyn Tweed, Mercedes Villalba, Martin Whitfield, Beatrice Wishart.

Thank you Friends - please do let us know if you get a reply from your MSP(s)!

Gender-based Violence

Faith and Violence Against Women

On International Women's Day, during UNCSW, JLI and WVI convened a meeting with interested organizations about **developing a Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls scale to strengthen evidence, inform programming and understand impact in the realm of faith and violence against women and girls**. The meeting kicked off with a message from the Executive Director of SVRI, also a founding member of this emerging consortium.

While much has been written on the complex role of faith, faith leaders and faith communities in the realm of gender equality and addressing violence, there is a dearth of experimental studies, such as randomised control trials and quasi-experimental studies. The lack of experimental data linking VAWG and religion is (at least partly) due to there being no robustly developed and validated VAWG and religion scales. The vision is **a scale that will be usable in different contexts, with different religions, relevant to MEAL frameworks, general VAWG or SGBV studies and to allow for comparable data and synthesis of learning**.

This work will be **led by Dr. Lisa LeRoux** of Stellenbosch University, and will commence with a literature review and consultative process, with initial funding from World Vision International. If you are interested in learning more or participating in the consortium, please contact florine@jliflc.com.

Questionnaire

The Gender based Violence (GBV) concern of WSAM has for some time now been active in discussing, and taking part in, strategies to reduce gender-based violence. We are planning to run an event/workshop about gender-based violence for Friends in Scotland, beginning with the West of Scotland.

To assist us in the planning and content of this event/workshop, we are endeavouring to understand the present level of knowledge that exists amongst Friends on the subject. To this end we have developed a questionnaire, which we would like responses to from as many Friends as possible so that we may better understand the starting point necessary for future discussions of gender-based violence.

With this in mind, we are asking all local meetings, (firstly in the West of Scotland), if they would join us in our efforts to reduce gender-based violence by, in the first instance, distributing the questionnaire and encouraging friends to respond.

Questionnaires will go out with this newsletter, or you can obtain a copy form your Local Meeting Clerk, or Margaret Roy who will be contacting LM Clerks to discuss the questionnaire and to decide which method of response is best suited to your LM.

Climate Change

Glasgow Quaker Climate Café

The idea for the Climate Café arose from our experience with running a café in the Meeting House during COP26. It felt good to welcome people and to have a relaxed, safe space to share our concerns about the climate crisis. And that is essentially what we have continued to do. We meet approximately once a month, in person for a light supper at 5.30 and blended from 6.30 for about 90 minutes. Numbers vary but typically we are 6 to 8 in the Meeting House with another 1 or 2 online. Most of those who come are Quakers, but we welcome anyone.

Having been going a bit over a year, at our last meeting we took time to reflect on our activities, deciding we wanted to continue in much the same way as before but occasionally meeting elsewhere to reach out a bit more. Our primary aim is to support one another in the climate-related work we are involved in, to share our experiences, and feelings and reactions to the crisis. We also share information about other climate related work we know about and helpful initiatives, and have a regular slot for 'Reasons to be Cheerful'. We have found that our regular meetings give us a focus for what we are doing, e.g. a target for writing to our MSPs and a place to report back and reflect on events or actions we've attended.

So, what are we involved in? As individuals, it's as varied as we are: opening up conversations on climate change with friends and other groups we belong to, running a climate café in a local school, informing ourselves by reading and by attending events, writing to our national and local representatives (we valued the input from our Parliamentary Engagement Officer on that), supporting other campaigning groups e.g. on digital actions and joining with other local and national initiatives, including direct action.

As a group we have held a film screening and a talk about local insulation initiatives and intend to have two or three such events a year, now that the Meeting Room is reliably available. We conducted a social media campaign during Lent, providing an action a day for Friends, and others, to consider – we hope some of you were nudged by that. And naturally we need to work with others: we are linked to the Scottish and Glasgow Community Climate Action Networks and to Interfaith Glasgow's Climate Justice section. Our Meeting is now a member of Eco Congregations Scotland.

Ecocide

Clare Phillips, Castle Douglas

“Ecocide” means unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.

~ *Independent Expert Panel for the Legal Definition of Ecocide, June 2021*

“The rules of our world are laws, and they can be changed. Laws can restrict or they can enable. What matters is what they serve. Many of the laws in our world serve property - they are based on ownership. But imagine a law that has a higher moral authority... a law that puts people and planet first. Imagine a law that starts from first do no harm that stops this dangerous game and takes us to a place of safety....” Polly Higgins, 2015

“We need to change the rules” Greta Thunberg, 2019

The above quotations are taken from the website landing page of **Stop Ecocide International** which is campaigning for ecocide to be adopted as a crime by the ICC.

Friends across BYM (including West Scotland AM) have been considering this matter and minutes from more than one area meeting asking Friends to discern if we are led to publically back **Stop Ecocide International’s** campaign were brought to the special open session of Meeting for Sufferings which followed the extra session of Yearly Meeting held 01/07/2023.

At that Meeting, one Friend ministered about the risks we take if we criminalize any human behaviour. I could see her point but I can also see how wealthy companies, individuals and even governments are not deterred from mining, deforestation and farming practices that harm the environment just by negative publicity and fines. If what they are doing is profitable then financial penalties will be factored into their planning cycles. The destruction of the Amazonian Rain Forest is one example. When Jair Bolsonaro took office as president of Brazil in 2019, he sent a clear message was that the region was 'open for business,' leading to a 92 percent surge in deforestation in the first eight months of his leadership, according to data from the country's INPE satellite service. (The Ecologist online 14/07/2023)

If a failure to take responsibility for the consequences of economic activity on the health of the planet becomes a criminal offence then leaders, owners, directors and other powerful people can be arrested, charged and even sent to prison. The Health and Safety at Work Act was an example of this in the UK. Now it’s the whole earth that’s at stake, not just some people’s livelihoods and it’s the underprivileged and those who can’t easily escape who are being most profoundly affected by pollution, flooding, rising temperatures and food poverty.

Trees

Bryan Bowes, Milngavie

Bryan is a Quaker of long standing. Now at Milngavie Meeting he previously edited this newsletter. However, Bryan was also a professor of Botany with a passion for trees. He has co-edited several books but his latest is *Trees & Forests, A Colour Guide: Biology, Pathology, Propagation, Silviculture, Surgery, Biomes, Ecology, and Conservation*

The following photos Bryan has selected from the book.









There are beautiful and wild forces within us. St Francis

Rights of Rivers

Ed Tyler, Argyll

Whilst, to Quakers and other spiritually-orientated groups, the whole of the Living Planet is recognised as sacred, most national governments seem to regard the “environment” as something full of useful but largely inert and unfeeling “stuff”, much of which is highly useful and – from a legal point of view – is designated as a set of resources to be extracted.

Nature reserves are set aside for living things that are deemed to be “important”, and often these are the only places that are protected - but even these areas are abused with impunity.

I like to look out for moves by civil society to change this prevailing narrative, and one of the most promising is the “**Rights to Rivers**” movement which is gaining momentum across the planet.

There are two particular legal cases which have succeeded in recent years.

The first was in 2017 in New Zealand:

“After years of negotiations with representatives of the Whanganui iwi (tribe), the Aotearoa/New Zealand Parliament enacted the [Te Awa Tupua Act \(2017\)](#). This legally recognised *Te Awa Tupua*, the Whanganui River and all its physical and metaphysical elements, as an indivisible and living whole. The Act acknowledges the river as a source of physical and spiritual sustenance, and that communities living along the river have an “inalienable connection with, and responsibility to, *Te Awa Tupua* and its health and well-being”. The Te Awa Tupua Act also awarded all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person to the river and established formal guardians to act on its behalf.” (quote and quotes below all from Synchronicity Earth.org – “Recognising the Rights of Rivers”).

The second was in Bangladesh:

“In 2009, the Bangladeshi Supreme Court ordered the creation of a Bangladeshi National River Protection Commission to address core harms occurring to rivers. Ten years after this, the High Court of Bangladesh recognised all rivers as ‘living entities’ and appointed the Bangladeshi National River Protection Commission as their legal guardian.

Since 2019, communities throughout the nation were able to plead for the protection and restoration of their rivers, leading to the demolition of 4,000 illegal structures, the recovery of 190 acres of land, and the closing of 231 unauthorised factories on the Buriganga River.”

Wouldn't it be brilliant if in Scotland we could get similar legislation passed? I have explored this in my bioregional work on the Clyde during the past few years but find that the Scottish Government is a long way from doing anything like this, partly due

to the fact that the indigenous people of Alba were forced into adopting “modern” ways centuries ago.

As a member of the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group, I am hoping to start discussions with sympathetic MSPs, but don't expect any announcements on the Rights of Scottish Rivers any time soon!

The Flow of Gratitude

‘Science and Spiritual Practices’ by Rupert Sheldrake

‘Most of us have been thankful for presents, or for the gifts of love, help and hospitality. We know what gratitude feels like. Everyone is in favour of it, or at least in favour of receiving it.....

The opposite of gratitude is a sense of entitlement. Our everyday life in a money-based economy heightens ingratitude because there is no need to feel grateful for a service we pay for.....

Disasters change our perspective. Often parents, or husbands, or wives, or children, or friends are taken for granted. But if they die, especially if they die unexpectedly, their families and friends become aware of how much they depended on them, and how much they received from them.....

....for materialists, although nature is mathematically and physically amazing, it is not deserving of gratitude, because it is not a gift, or an act of choice or purpose, but an inevitable consequence of blind laws and forces.....

By contrast, in many religious cosmologies, the entire universe has come forth through the creative power of God. In one of the Hindu interpretations, the world is the dream of the god Vishnu, and is all in his mind.....

If we believe that God is the source of all things, and that God's being sustains the universe- a belief shared by Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus- then our ultimate gratitude is to God for the very fact of existence..... Our gratitude is also to the universe, our galaxy, our solar system, our earth, on which our lives depend, and the microbes, plants and animals that provide our food, and the human societies and cultures that sustain all human lives.’

Entering Feeling

“I have heard you.”

Meant kindly but when does this lead to emotional abuse?

It can be a signing off.

I don't want to hear any more.

I can't engage you further because. . .

I would have to unpack my own feelings.

Actually, I do not understand where you are coming from.

Thar be dragons!

I would have to enter into the unknown with you.

Do I want such intimacy?

I AM AFRAID

But I do not want to touch my fears.

I COULD DROWN

In the unknown.

The WAY OF THE HEART is simple.

It has clarity.

But it can be hard.

There are no masks,

No protective cloaking.

It is bare

stripping away all artifice.

Do not touch my HEART.

There is pain there.

LOVE? It is a dangerous path

For the Ego.

THE PAIN OF UNITY

Does not split into duality,

It is not the path of the Intellect.

If you misunderstand your mind, you are an ordinary mortal, if you understand your mind, you are a sage. In this it makes no difference whether you are male or female, old or young, smart or simple. Jakushitsu

Bear in Mind: Tony D'Souza's Thought for the week. Reprinted from The Friend 26th May 2023

There is one idea at the heart of Quakerism, an idea that is as alive and relevant today as it was in 1652. It is called 'convincement' and involves a personal experience of the divine. The truth at the heart of Quakerism is as simple and as stark as that. Convincement is necessary, and it is a personal, transcendental experience of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Like all truly great ideas, it is very simple. George Fox said this: 'There is a light then enlightens everyone who comes into the world.' There is Quakerism in a nutshell. There is a light within us that enlightens us. All we need to do is wait upon it, or attend to it within ourselves, and it will lead us and guide us in all things, because it is nothing less than the light of God. Wow! Goodbye to all the internet gurus, the preachers, the pundits, the prelates and the priests. We don't need any of them. We have a light that will teach us and guide us directly. All we need to do is to learn to listen to it. Happily, Fox tells us how to do that too: 'Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence all life comes, to allay all tempests, against blustering and storms.'

But how do we come 'still and cool' in our own minds? For people in the twenty-first century, that might seem difficult, because our minds are so over-stimulated, stuffed with ideas and imagery. For us, stilling the mind might seem impossible. But it isn't. If you have difficulty with it, try practising mindfulness. Mindfulness is the perfect foundation for observing thought. Simply by closing your eyes and constantly returning to the sensation of your breath, you can soon learn to observe your thoughts. From this, you can learn to detach from your mind, because your thought processes and your mind are the same thing.

Then the adventure really begins. Fox tells us 'to dwell in that which is pure of God in you, lest your thoughts get forth, and then evil thoughts get up, surmising one against the other.' We are told to attend to that which is pure within us, and not to allow the mind to carry us away. We are instructed to return to it again and again after thought carries us away. This is what it means to 'mind the pure Seed of God in you.'

Sovereign advice indeed. Fox cannot be clearer about the perils of trusting the outward rational mind: 'The light within, which doth convince thee, will show thee when the mind goes forth, and show thee thy daily cross, which is to crucify the carnal mind. Therefore do not give way to your wills, nor busy yourself nor minds with needless and careless words or such things, for they will draw your mind from God, but keep within. For the measure is within, and the pearl is within you, and the word of God is within you.'

Let the adventure begin.

This rich, uplifting novel is a monument to an avowedly good man, St Cuthbert (aka Cuddy), and to the impact that Durham Cathedral - built to house and venerate his apparently immaculate, undecayed remains - had on several later generations. The first and longest of five parts is set in 995 AD, among a group of monks and accompanying laypeople who trudged the north of England with Cuthbert's coffin, towards the end of their decades-long quest to find a burial place for him safe from Viking marauders. The monks are a motley crew, not all of them good men in this telling, and this section is narrated by Ediva, a young woman, possibly Black, who travels with them as their cook. It is she who has the first vision of where their journey's end might be, on a wooded hill above a looping river, which is confirmed by the monk who has least difficulty seeing that of God in her.

The second section is set in 1346, in the years of the cathedral's construction and is written as a love affair between Eda and a travelling stonemason, while her brutal, abusive archer-husband is away fighting Scots in contested Northern borderlands. A brief, harrowing interlude in 1656, surely the cathedral's darkest hour, gives voice to Scottish soldiers who were marched south and imprisoned there by Cromwell's army after their defeat at the fateful Battle of Dunbar.

Jumping forward to 1827, a snobbish Antiquarian from Oxford University reluctantly ventures North, at the request of senior cathedral staff, to oversee the opening of Cuthbert's tomb in order to prove that his bodily remains are not immaculate after all, and that faith does not depend on this. An enigmatic housekeeper called Edith plays a small part in this story. Although this section is based on an actual, well documented exhumation of Cuthbert the story here unfolds as a haunting – by ghosts whom we the reader already know. Myers adapts a narrative form made famous by M R James, not, as he did, to warn against supernatural threats to the reason and sanity of arrogant atheists, but to make a point about the indelible presence of the past in the present, if only one cares to look, and the strength which can be drawn from recognising and accepting this.

So, in the final section, set in the winter of 2019, an undereducated young labourer in the Durham gig economy gets a chance to do menial work for the stonemasons involved in renovating the cathedral. He comes to feel the past in his bones, and eventually has a "spiritual" experience (in his mind at least, but maybe more than that). Myers uses this last chapter to nail the argument he makes throughout *Cuddy* that we moderns cannot know the truth of distant history *for certain* - not even from the official records and diligently researched factual sources from which he quotes so copiously and respectfully – but that we will impoverish ourselves beyond measure if we do not make the imaginative effort to try. This is a historical novel in a very literal sense, not just a story "set in the past", but a

consideration of time's passage, and its accumulating significance for us now. Merely describing the five sections, as I have done here, in no way does justice to the beauty and power of this fine book, whose deeper subject is virtue, and whose attentively drawn people and places linger long after the final page has been turned.

Sacred Earth Sacred Soul :A Celtic guide to listening to our souls and saving the world' John Phillip Newell, William Collins Books

Pete Clarke, Glasgow

I think it is important, (though not traditional in academic writing), to explain what some may see as my overuse of 'inverted commas'. Outside of identifying direct or paraphrased quotes from Newell, I use them to signify concepts such as 'god' and 'religion' as *contested* concepts. By this I mean that our understanding of these simple words also carries differing connotations for readers -we cannot rely on our sharing a 'meaning' of key concepts, but this should not prevent us from discussing them.

For those of us interested in understanding and exploring our own spirituality in the context of Celtic roots, Newell's book is an easy to read, but detailed, introduction aimed, (in Newell's words), to 'help us renew our faith, heal the earth, overcome our conflicts, and reconnect with ourselves', (p1). Though couched and introduced in a broadly Christian context, those of us who do not identify as Christian can also find important insights into the rhythms of nature and thus connection with our 'god' – no matter what we perceive that to be.

His main tenet through his exploration of the work of key philosophical figures, is to remind us that all human beings are inherently spiritual and part of nature, even though we at times may lose sight of these truths. Newell sets out to give hope through a new spiritual foundation in the Celtic context – that hope being built on the creation of a better world.

According to Newell, we 'know' things that we have not been 'taught'. Of course, as Quakers we may understand this, but it may also be at odds with some religious beliefs. Newell wants to take us to a place and an understanding where we can be reawakened to a 'knowledge' that the earth is sacred, and that we are part of it and its nature. He argues that 'teaching' and 'religion' has resulted in us having 'fallen out of alignment with the deepest truths within us, [and asks the question], How are we to awaken again...the sacredness at the heart of all life, the sacredness that is also at the heart of our own being?' (Newell p2).

This brings us to Newell's focus - that Celtic spiritual tradition is based on the essence of all things in nature – but that this thread has been lost and forgotten through time and the 'teaching' of 'religion'. 'We need to listen to what our souls and spiritual nature already know' (p3). At the centre of Newell's argument is that

this way of 'knowing' resonates in many 'religions' and spiritual wisdoms throughout history but can be accessed by anyone seeking a way of seeing the world through what our 'souls' already know.

Newell describes that we 'suffer from soul forgetfulness' (p3) as we become submersed under layers of religious belief which build walls of religious practice and thus forget the 'sacred', the 'sacred' being that which Newell regards as the Celtic way of seeing. For Newell, when we speak of the 'sacred' we are offering respect and honour to something which includes the earth, its creatures and all humankind – this is the focus of Celtic wisdom.

After a brief description of the 'Celts', (for those readers perhaps not familiar with UK and European geography), Newell goes on to emphatically argue that he is not proposing that we 'go back to a golden Celtic age' (p8), but that instead Celtic wisdom is something which can carry us forward. As a way of seeing and seeking it pays attention to the deepest parts of being a human being in a natural world in need of reawakening to the 'sacred'.

However, to assist us in this journey to the future, Newell calls upon the wisdoms of past and contemporary Celtic writing - the contemporary used by Newell to illustrate the evolving traditions of Celtic wisdom. He does this across nine chapters, each calling upon writings by, or about, different Celtic figures. Whilst the sacredness of the earth and our human souls is at the heart of the discussion, each chapter explores specific illustrations of this theme. The writers he introduces us to vary in their approach, (sometimes theological, sometimes philosophical). Newell invites us to read and understand the differing perspectives of Celtic wisdom contained in the chapters, which add a greater understanding to the books central tenet.

Each chapter concludes with a reflection on the subject matter of the chapter and invites us to take a brief time in stillness to reflect on how a particular 'wisdom' applies to your life. For example, the reflection on chapter two 'The Sacred feminine: St Brigid of Kildare offers:

'Words of Awareness'

'St Brigid [ca 451-523] embodies the beauty and strength of the sacred feminine, which is deep within us all. Stories of her life call forth this dimension of the divine in us, that we may be strong again to serve the interrelationships of all things, within us, between us, and among us in the world'

(Reflect for a brief time on the ways this wisdom applies to your life) (p70)

Newell, in the reflection on all chapters then offers us a verse from the 'Prayer of awareness'. In the case of Chapter two:

*Awake, o my soul,
To the beauty of the divine deep within you*

And awake to its fragrance in the body of the earth.

Know its strength and attraction

And its grace to heal what has been torn apart.

Awake o my soul,

To the beauty of the divine deep within you.

(Listen silently for a few minutes within the sacredness of your being) (p70)

Newell's account of the differing understanding of Brigid, from the 'midwife at the birth of 'christ'', to the 'barmaid at the inn in Bethlehem' (p47), (both of which belie the idea of a fifth century Irish saint being able to be present in first century Palestine!), demonstrates for Newell the threshold between the Christian and pre-Christian belief systems and the continuum of pre-Christian beliefs, rituals, and understandings. (Note it is said that whilst Brigid's mother was a Christian, her father (stepfather) was a Druid)

What he demonstrates to us throughout the book and with the aid of the different chapters is that 'Celtic way of seeing has a long lineage' (p22), and that all the 'knowing' within Celtic wisdom, then and now, is always an invitation to re-imagine our relationship with the earth, nature, and each other, remembering that our 'soul', is at the centre of our being and it is our 'soul' that is 'sacred'. In all of this he reminds us that within our, and the earth's, sacredness, love is at the centre – a love we for each other and the earth. As Newell concludes, 'when we love, we are most truly alive. When we love, we are most fully awake to the true heart of the other, made of 'god', sacred' (p255).

Earth's Voices: messages for our times from nature's guardians.

Laura Newbury, Tatterdemalion Blue Press, 2022. £14.99.

Nicola James Maharg, Glasgow

Our ancestors listened to their land. We can learn to listen again. As we raise our awareness, we engage the power needed to heal and to create our future.

I have known Laura since we met as students working at Glenthorne Quaker Guesthouse and in the forty plus years since then as a sister F/friend and in Quaker and Friends Fellowship Healing. Laura is by training an artist and teacher, her facilitation and writing retains that steady quality of careful commitment to detail and truth: and to where that light falls. In the last decade or so she has been an angel workshop facilitator and has already published two books.

Her latest book *Earth's Voices* is a testimony to both nature and spirit. Full of maps and photographs, it is fluent and fascinating in its local detail in the naming of

places, plants and passes whose topography Laura learned on childhood walks with her father Michael 'in some of the remotest parts of Scotland's Highland glens and mountains: Cairngorms, Torridon, Glen Affric, the great wilderness of the Fisherfields and Letterewe.' *Earth's Voices* is worth reading for this poetic language alone.

Permeating the text is her mother's spirit to whom the book is dedicated. Patricia was welcoming, laughing, light-filled - supportive of such expeditions. When Laura's parents first moved to Moray Patricia 'thought she was in heaven when hanging clothes on the washing line, from where she could see the clear vista over the Moray Firth to the Black Isle and Ben Wyvis floating on the horizon to the north, like a mirage.'

The whole family attended Inverness Quaker meeting which gathered at Scanport Hall, situated on the road to Dores at the head of Loch Ness. As a child Laura 'often wondered about the connection between spirituality and Nature, as I wasn't able to separate them...The presence of God was within the silence of the group, but could also be felt all around in the sunlit trees waving outside and in the calling of birds...I could not decide if I felt the presence of God most strongly outdoors or in the worshipping group of Quakers.'

Laura writes in the present tense rediscovering ancient Scottish nature spirits or 'divas' guided by the angel Immantelle's messages to her. In particular 'the layers of history of people' who have lived for example along the Strath at the River Nairn (Uisge Nearne in Gaelic), the water where the native alder tree thrives. St Mary's Chapel still stands, once scene of the reformation and the later Clearances. Nearby are sacred Pictish wells on which soft cloths or clothing rags hung like prayer flags, now visible again in a nearby tree. They wave to the past and the past waves back even as the recent development along the A9 takes the native woods in its wake. What we thought was past is present and what we thought was in the future has already arrived would we but attend to it.

In this way not all is naturally wonderful. The book does not shirk from destruction. It is also and importantly a prophetic warning – tread carefully on this precious planet of ours, remember it in the smallest, remotest of things, its language and its people and plants, as well as the nearer and thus seemingly larger concerns. Back on Skye, even as I read this book for the first time, across the sound, the cloudless sun was burning Mallaig's bracken on the braes.

In many ways Laura's gift for discerning and describing the 'thin places', where the veil between the material and other world is porous, is akin to that of another female writer. I imagine them conversing together through time. Otta Swire described her homeland *Skye: the Island and its Legends* seventy years ago. Travelling along the narrow roads of her family's native island she too wrote and wove together names, places and pre-Christian myths. 'The road from Tarskavaig to Ord is very wild and very beautiful...it runs through a natural wood of oak, hazel and

birch, now marked on the map as Wood of Tokavaig, but once a sacred grove whose old name of Doire nan Druidhean is still Druidhean (or Tradain) has been translated as the Grove of Quarrelling or of Starlings or of Druids.' The contemporary award-winning fantasy author Neil Gaimon credits Otta's descriptions of native woodlands with inspiration for his writing. I imagine readers will continue to be similarly affected and inspired by *Earth's Voices*.

It made me think more deeply about our family's instinctive avoidance of the famous Fairy Pools on Skye where we live now. More than the new scarring car park, the land eroded by pathways, it seemed wise to leave such places be. This I now realise wasn't just avoidance of commercialisation, it is a primitive love and respect for such things revived, speaking in the present. Something Quakers would understand.

For both Otta and Laura there is no defined line or hard place, no awkward mismatch between facts and abstract, the places, myth and spirit. We can live alongside. Where 'the air is thin' in spiritual terms, there is cogency and clarity. We are at once rooted and thrown free and, as Eliot said, 'know our place for the first time'.

What shall we be with such knowing?

Earth's Voices is available from bookshops or on line through Laura's website. www.lauranewbury.co.uk £14.99.

A message from Mark Coleman.

Several Friends have expressed an interest in coming to see me at this year's fringe.

The story of Adam Smith and David Hume, two towering figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, will be told at a world premiere at this year's Edinburgh Fringe. Glasgow Meeting's **Mark Coleman** plays the role of philosopher David Hume in *Enquiry Concerning Hereafter*.

Andy Corelli, the play's director, says: "I suppose the modern terminology is bromance. There is deep friendship, trust and respect for each other, but also joviality and sarcasm." The play is in two acts - one focusing on the death of Hume, the other on the death of Smith. Both men encounter Charon, the boatman who ferries dead souls across the River Styx.

The 90mins performances will be staged 4th- 27th Aug at Panmure House, Adam's Smith's own home, just off Canongate every day (*except Monday*) at 4.00pm, with extra matinees on Saturday's at 12 noon.

<https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/enquiry-concerning-hereafter>

News of Local Meetings

Dumfries

One Sunday in June we discussed the topic of reparations, currently receiving much attention in the Friend and the media in general.

We began with some history of slavery, and it appears that like greed, power, control, oppression, brutality, exploitation ... the keeping of slaves has been with us since time immemorial, and remains with us to this day. What can we do, what should we do, about it?

BYM has formally taken a stance in support of practical and meaningful reparation, as have some of the wealthy families who owned slaves. The latter, I think, is certainly a morally right course of action. We all, obviously, condemned the notion of slavery, and deeply regret that it has ever happened. But feeling sorrow that something has happened, and apologising for it are not the same thing.

I was aware that some of us present that day had, when much younger, lived and worked in former colonies, either in Africa or the Caribbean. None of us mentioned it, but I thought just this morning that that was reparation of a kind, helping to develop the educational or medical systems until the local population could take things over.

At our discussion we mostly avoided dwelling on racism, so often entwined with slavery, particularly Afro-Caribbean slavery. I did quite recently hear a story about a black American who had visited Africa to explore his roots, and on returning to the US commented "Thank God for the Slave trade!" It may be apocryphal, but given the present living conditions in parts of Africa, it is certainly possible.

Either way, please don't shoot the messenger

Jan Lethbridge

Laura McMurtie has written a lengthy paper collating the history and conditions of slavery in the context of reparations. Send an e mail for a copy.

Shared Eldership

This is a topic of much concern to Dumfries meeting. Their proposals include:

- Establish a list of friends willing to act as an elder on a short-term basis.
- Each individual to fulfil the role for one (or two?) month(s).
- Current Elder/Clerk to provide a stand-in role if for some reason the monthly elder is unable to attend and to provide support if needed.
- Review the arrangements after six (?) months to establish if we feel it is working or needs changes.

Glasgow

Trees for Life

Mary Cox , Glasgow

We had a special collection on Sunday 25th July and raised a total of £110 which enabled Glasgow Quaker Meeting to establish a dedicated grove of trees. We received the following:

Thank you for contributing to the Caledonian Forest.

Your tree(s) will help to rewild the Caledonian Forest, a rich habitat found only in the Scottish Highlands. It will be a sapling grown from locally collected seed and will be one of a number of species we plant such as Scots pine, willow, birch, rowan, hazel, alder, holly, aspen and bird cherry.

Your grove will be planted at one of our remote sites in the Scottish Highlands. Trees for Life plants in remote areas best suited to the return of the Caledonian Forest such as on our conservation estate, Dundreggan, situated near Loch Ness, and Glen Affric National Nature Reserve.

Your sapling will be planted alongside other young, native trees, transforming open hillsides into healthy young woodland, rich in wildlife such as red squirrel, black grouse, capercaillie, wood ants and twinflower. Once the trees reach maturity, natural regeneration will go on to create the wild forests of the future for generations to enjoy.

If you would like to add a tree/s now or at a later date to commemorate a special event just go to treesforlife.org.uk/groves/457932/ or look up a grove on their website in our name Glasgow Quaker Meeting.

Faslane Meeting for Worship

24th September & 11th November

At 11am

For more details contact Mary Alice Mansell
or Daphne Wasserman. More Quakers needed.
Bring a picnic (and an umbrella and seat)
and enjoy good company.

Opposite Diane Bowes of Milngavie sits it out.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

19 th August	Area Meeting	Tarbert/Lochgilphead 11.30am – 4pm
7 th October	Area Meeting	Dunblane/Lanark 11.30am – 4pm
13 th January 2024	Area Meeting	Glasgow and Milngavie
4 th March	Area Meeting	by Zoom
13 th April	Area Meeting	South Cluster: Castle Douglas, Dumfries, Wigtown
3 rd June	Area Meeting	by Zoom
17 th August	Area Meeting	West Cluster: Ayrshire, Argyll, Arran, Islay & Jura, Mull & Iona
5 th October	Area Meeting	East Cluster Dunblane and Lanark



Hold in the Light

Alison and Bob Mandelson

Penny Lilley

Edie Phoenix

Laura McMurtie

There is a meeting of Friends Fellowship of Healing on first Monday of each month.

Contact Nicola on <nicola.james53@gmail.com>

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The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of individuals, They do not necessarily present the views of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The deadline for contributions or the next issue of WSQN is 15th September 2023.

And, good to see the enthusiasm, but please do not send in articles over 1000 words should be send in Word format only to the editor Margaret Roy.

