

Forty-Three newsletter

Number 488
December 2019



Oxford Friends Meeting
43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW

Reflecting upon F(f)riends and F(f)riendship

November's Friday with Friends began with three powerful contributions on the historical meaning of the terms Friend and Friendship and their meaning for Quakers today. These were followed by discussions about organising Friendly Four groups in January, in which four F(f)riends who know little about each other decide on ways to find out more about what Quaker 'Friendship' and practice means to them, during four meetings arranged over four months. Two of the contributions are included below.

Friendship

When I opened the door of 43 St Giles one Wednesday lunchtime about four years ago, I was not primarily looking for friendship with either upper or lower case F. In fact, I felt so tentative that I chose a small meeting where I thought I was unlikely to meet anybody I knew. I was looking for silence, being in solo flight from too many words that seemed to have little relation to problems or situations.

I was hoping to find a way of living morally and responsibly *in the world*.

I was escaping from a church that showed disturbing tendencies towards social illiberalism

and that seemed over-concerned with a Christ-centred Trinity focused on an empathetic relationship with the sufferings of Holy Week. Compared with this, the Light Within seemed an entity with which one could not identify in a facile manner – and so was most attractive and liberating.



As I grew more confident about identifying myself as an Attender, I found again people I had known in what now seemed a previous life who had been cordial colleagues and acquaintances over many years. We shared a new commitment and became Friends of both kinds. And when I came to involve myself in projects in Meeting, I met new colleagues and made new friends. A shared commitment is a great bond, and "that of God in every man" a good starting point for new relationships.

Continued on next page ...

Deadline for contributions to the January 2020 issue: noon, Friday 13 December

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, or a paper copy can be left in the pigeonhole of any editor. Items for the calendar (on the last page) can be emailed to office@oxfordquakers.org.

Because I found in Quakerism what I had lacked in the Church of England, and because I did not find here what had oppressed me there, I was very slow to notice the intense spiritual dynamic. In fact it was only when I involved myself with the library and began as a professional librarian to examine the material there that I realised the vast extent of Quaker spiritual writings, and how far back they go in our long history.

So a whole new landscape is opening up for me and I wonder where I should start and where I shall be led. I notice that early Friends were more concerned with Christ than with the Father or the Holy Ghost (though one might have thought that of the three persons the Holy Ghost would be the most congenial to Quakers). I notice the strong desire for spiritual connection with the Light and how a creative tension between the Light and the Light Within seems to be felt but not at all times or in all places. I look forward to exploring further.

Catherine Hilliard



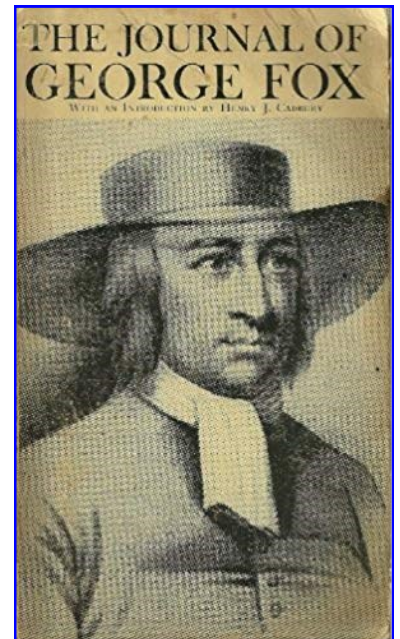
Friends?

George Fox in his diary calls his supporters Friends (capital F) from the earliest days – 1648. But he was dictating the diary later in life, and he may not have used that word at the time of the actual events. Similarly, the rather disparaging word Quakers seems to have emerged from a court case in 1650, and it appears very occasionally in the diary from events in 1654 onwards.

In those days of political turmoil there was little let-up in the persecution of the early Friends or Quakers, so the diary hardly seems affected by the

start of the civil war in 1642, when good Christians fought each other to the death, or by the killing of the king in 1649. The Commonwealth was dissolved in 1653, the Protectorate in 1659, and the Monarchy restored with the coronation of Charles II in 1660. After Charles's death and the accession of James II, William Penn lost the access to the throne that he had had in earlier days, and it was not until 1689 that William (of William and Mary) eventually signed the Act of Toleration that made it safe to be a Quaker.

Fox's early followers called themselves Children of the Light and Friends of Truth. This was in an environment of religious disputation, with mainstream and maverick faith groups becoming more and more bitter and even violent towards each other. Catholics had a hierarchy that handed



down mandatory concepts that aroused controversy (to say the least). For example, paying money to the church for 'indulgences' was believed to alter the way you were judged in the afterlife. Protestants had wildly varying takes on the scriptures, internally inconsistent as they were, but all protestants agreed on the primacy of Scripture. Broadly, the Old Testament described the evolution of a rule-based faith, where God was deemed to endorse unpalatable or flawed leaders when no better alternatives were around. At the same time, prophets were encouraged to denounce those leaders without usually dethroning them. The New Testament also has some questionable myths, but it hinged on the proposition that God is love. This love was needed so that God's grace, incarnated in Jesus, could redeem mankind from its inherent sinfulness.

Quakers stepped aside from much of this. They still saw Jesus and the Scriptures as the starting point or touchstone. But over and above this, the Spirit in the hearts of men and women – no misogyny here – is what led them. Even then, whilst the promptings

of love and truth might guide an individual, for issues beyond personal conduct the feeling of the gathered meeting was the necessary source of discernment. And who were all those joined in worship at Meeting? **Friends!**

Penal law in general under Charles II was especially repressive to dissenters and Catholics. In addition to the four main statutes enacted between 1661 and 1665 and known collectively as the Clarendon Code, a separate Quaker Act 1662 specifically targeted the Quakers' refusal to swear an oath to the king. The Quakers Act 1695 finally allowed affirmation to substitute for oath, though many Quakers were unhappy that the wording of the affirmation included the phrase "in the presence of Almighty God". An amended version, omitting reference to God, was granted in 1722 in good King George's golden days. The Marriage Act 1753 legitimised Quaker marriages with no presiding priest. It was not until 1793 that we formally called ourselves The Religious Society of Friends.

Richard Seebohm

Felt Connections between Quaker and Butoh Practice

As the novelist E.M. Forster once wrote, 'Only connect'. This inspiring injunction has meant a lot to me throughout my life, and even become something of a habit. Today I would like to share with you some of the connections I see between my practice as a Quaker and as a Butoh dancer.

Butoh dance emerged in American-occupied post-war Japan and is still little known in Europe. It is not easy to define, mainly because of its commitment to resisting standard definition and easy categorization. Today though, many of us will be aware of it through the Red Rebels branch of Extinction Rebellion, whose movements and guerrilla approaches are quintessentially Butoh.

To evoke what Butoh seeks to articulate, its two founding fathers, Kazuo Ohno and Hijikata Tatsumi, called it a dance of both darkness and light; one concerned with preserving community in all its diversity, respecting messiness and shadows as well as the light within, and inspiring personal transformation.

Two key elements of its language, silence and a combination of charged stillness and movement, are used to connect with our humanness, move us away from seeing the mind as distinct from the body, and instead see the body as the home of thought and feeling. It is in such ways of seeking for a naked enlivening encounter with the source of our being I find first parallels between Quaker and Butoh practice.

It is also very much understood as a spiritual practice that can serve as a channel for grace: one in which reflection and experimentation lead to change and fresh perspectives. As Kazuo Ohno put it, 'find the spirit and the form will take care of itself'. This resonates for me with my understanding of ministry, and the belief each of us has something new and of value to offer others.

Finally, I see another connection in Butoh's expression of deeply engrained, personal, and collective politics. Butoh was from the outset conceptualised as an activist dance form that rejects the 'bad check called democracy' (Hijikata Tatsumi). Hence it is often used to call attention to environmental and social issues.



Rather than my explaining more, why not come to watch a performance in Oxford? The group I practice with, Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre, are performing at Corpus Christi College on Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 January 2020. The show is called 'Tipping Point' and is a creative response to the threat of climate change. For more details, and to book, please see [here](#), or go the Café Reason website at <http://www.cafereason.com/>

Juliet Henderson

Senseless at Seventy?

I was 70 this year. Surely the sensible thing for me to do is to curl up with a cup of tea and watch daytime television? Maybe, but I have a problem. My body definitely knows I'm 70, but no one told my brain. So instead of taking it easy I've taken leave of my senses and decided to study for a PhD. Word has spread around Meeting and a few inquisitive (unwary?) souls have been kind enough to ask me what I'll be studying. This is the best answer I can currently offer.



But first, why is this an appropriate topic for Forty-Three? That's easier to answer – it's because I'm studying modern-day Quaker language. More specifically, I'm studying how Quakers use language to communicate with (for the most part) non-Quakers. My current plan is to carry out a linguistic analysis of press releases and parliamentary statements issued by Friends House over the last two decades.

I've chosen these documents not because they are necessarily the best representation of Quaker ideas, but because they are the documents most likely to be seen outside Quaker circles. My plan is to examine the documents for words that occur more frequently in them than in similar documents from non-Quaker sources. (I'll be happy to tell you how, just ask!) Then I'll try to work out which of these keywords are used metaphorically and look at how the metaphors colour the message that's being conveyed.

Does that matter? Yes, because we often choose metaphors almost automatically, with little or no conscious thought, yet they can influence enormously the way the person reading what we've

written (or hearing what we say) thinks about the topic we're discussing. That's a big claim, but it's well attested.

To give just one example of many, researchers Paul Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky asked two groups of people to read different versions of a story about urban crime. One version described crime as a "wild beast preying on the city" while the other described it as a "virus infecting the city".

When they subsequently asked members of the two groups for their ideas on how crime should be tackled, those who had seen the first version were likely to suggest hunting down the "wild beast" (the perpetrators) and caging it, while those who had seen the second version were likely to suggest investigating the source of the "virus" and implementing preventative measures (social reforms). As I only have 500 words for this article, this is an oversimplification of the research, but hopefully it captures the essence.

Most linguists agree that metaphors are unavoidable – we all use them all of the time. Linguists also agree that metaphors inevitably highlight certain aspects of the topic they're describing while masking others. I believe it's important that we, as Quakers, have some insight into what our metaphors reveal and conceal. And I'm carrying out research in the hope of contributing to that insight. Senseless or sensible? Only time will tell!

Keith Wilson

Retreat Day Chants - CD

At the Retreat Day on 23 November Glen Williams and John Mason led a chanting group, using chants from Paulette Meier based on various writings of early Friends. Two of these were sung with everyone during the afternoon.

If you want to know more, here is her website where you can listen to many of her chants. Her CD is on sale at the Quaker Bookshop. <https://bookshop.quaker.org.uk/>.

Anne Watson



Quaker Meeting at the Ashmolean Museum

I don't know how many Friends knew of the Ashmolean Museum's One World Festival on 16 and 17th November? As well as showcases for art, music and dance, it featured all the world's faiths. As last year, we were invited to hold a Quaker Meeting. I now realise that we were one of the few outposts of Christianity, among Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Baha'i and other events. About twenty four of us worshipped for a half hour in the Cast Gallery. Oxford Friends were at the same time remembering Peggy Heeks in the Meeting House, so many of us were either occasional attenders or first timers, but the silent witness was truly felt.

Elisabeth Salisbury and Richard Seeborn

A Poem and Why I Like It

Our own Poems in the Library Group invite you to an **open-mike and mince pies** festive celebration in the Meeting House, **from 18:30 – 20:30 on Saturday 14 December**. Bring a poem (preferably not by yourself!) and read it aloud to the rest of us. All welcome! This is a free event with a collection for the Building Fund, plus a donation to Oxford Friends Action on Poverty (OXFAP).

Stephen Yeo
stephen.yeo@phonecoop.coop

Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Iain McLean in Conversation

Friday 10 January 2020

19:00 – 21:00

Oxford Quaker Meeting House

This exciting occasion will be a Quaker conversation in which political scientist and historian Iain McLean talks to astronomer Jocelyn Bell Burnell about life, the universe, and some other things. Open to the public, all are welcome. Refreshments will be on sale. This is a fundraising event for the Oxford Quaker Meeting garden room project. Ticket price £10 (plus a small booking fee if using Eventbrite). Tickets can be purchased from the office or using the following link:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/astronomer-jocelyn-bell-burnell-talks-to-iain-mclean-about-life-and-the-universe-tickets-81371256619?utm_campaign=new_event_email&utm_medium=email&utm_source=eb_email&utm_term=viewmyevent_button

Jocelyn Bell Burnell is best known as the astrophysicist who discovered pulsars (rotating neutron stars), but did not share in the resulting Nobel Prize. She has always been remarkably un-bitter about that. Her generosity is further shown by her donation of a recent £2.3 million physics prize to the Institute of Physics to form a fund to assist female, minority, and refugee physics students. She has often spoken of her feelings of 'outsider' status as an Ulster Quaker doctoral student in Cambridge.

I know Jocelyn as a fellow Quaker and from her time as President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), of which I am a fellow. We worked together on projects run by the RSE and the other UK national academies to explain the issues on devolution in the nations and territories of the UK.

In our talk, I hope we will open by reflecting on 'outsider' status at places like Oxford and Cambridge, because that is how I felt too, when I first arrived from Scotland. I hope we will go on, as the advert for our talk says, to discuss life, the universe, and some other things.

Iain McLean

A Quaker Phrase Book
Taken from *The Friend*, July 21, 1967
Written by Alan and Julie Longman

Some Quaker words and phrases have been used so often that they have either lost their meaning entirely or now imply something different. The translations given here are not intended to cast doubt on the original meaning they had, but rather to emphasise that, in order to “speak the truth in love”, one must search for ordinary, plain words, and having used them, drop them.

PHRASES

In the past, Friends ...
We need to nurture our spiritual resource
I hope that will be done
Mindful of
Our Friend
Could not see their way to ...
The modern world
As Quakers we ...
May we be led to ...
Let us go forward (back)
While recognising that ...
Reaching out towards others
With renewed conviction
Rooted and grounded
Reaffirm our deep sense of ...
Lest it might seem
It has (never) been the custom of Friends
We would urge upon those of our members
It is with a profound sense of our own inadequacy

We are afraid of the future.
Meeting seems dead.
I hope someone else will do it.
Remembering that.
The fellow whose name I always forget.
Decided against.
Them.
Us.
We’re in the dark.
No basic change likely.
We disagree entirely.
Regretting that outsiders don’t come in.
Did we really face the possibility of being wrong?
Stuck and unable to get off tarmac.
State our view.
It is.
This newcomer, what does he know about it?
For God’s sake, don’t rock the boat.
We are (not?) grovelling.

WORDS

profound	Deep
deep	?
afresh	again
within	inside
heartening	encouraging
manifest	clear
Outreach	preaching to the converted
Corporate	Majority
Heritage	Good name

And finally a fictitious but all too possible conference report:

Once again we have been reminded of the many opportunities that may be open to each one of us. In the past, Friends were rooted and grounded in the deepest foundation of life, and we too may be led to a fuller recognition of our spiritual heritage. In our deliberations, we have been conscious of the need for a reawakening of our awareness of the indwelling purpose in life, which as Friends we must ever cherish and make manifest.

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Even as we have been mindful of our deep, underlying unity, yet at the same time we recognise that, while some may find their approach in the steadfast upholding of the established concerns and testimonies of our beloved Society, others of our number may perhaps see their way along new paths. May we all seek to gain fresh insight concerning our true places in the modern world.

And its translation:

We knew before we came that there were hundreds of things that needed doing, but we haven't started doing them yet. What was it that was special about early Friends? Whatever it was, we don't seem to have it, and it doesn't help when those Young Friends want to drag us into their crazy schemes. Pacifism, foreign missions to Africa and Asia, temperance, plain dress and plain speech – isn't that what the world still needs?

With thanks to Richard Seebom for sharing

What Do We Do With Our White Poppies?

I was just wondering what to do with my white poppy on 12 November when my eyes lit on an unattended display in Oxford City Library.

What do others do with theirs?

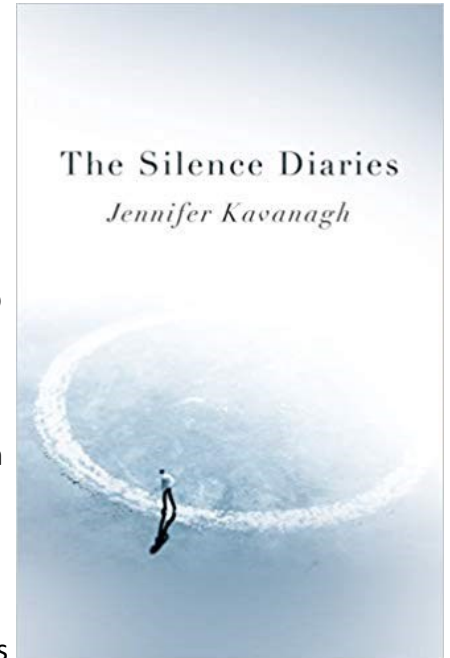
Tany Alexander



The Silence Diaries

Jennifer Kavanagh kindly wrote this piece for the 43 Newsletter, in which she considers the question of 'silence' in the title of her new book, The Silence Diaries. The book is now available in the Meeting House library.

The Silence Diaries is my second novel. What I have learned is that in writing fiction, I have to let go, to allow the book to unfold as it will and as the characters demand. It's such a blending of the conscious and unconscious mind. Something that I have always



known, and now found to be true, is that it is the pondering that matters. The more you ponder, the fewer false starts there will be. As Joyce Carol Oates said, "Novels begin, not on the page, but in meditation and daydreaming. In thinking, not writing."

I did not set out to write a novel about silence. On the contrary, the starting point was a meeting with a ventriloquist. It was voices that fascinated me first, and that, as a Quaker I suppose, led naturally to silence.

Mention the word 'Silence', and Quakers feel they know all about it. That's what we do, isn't it? But Quaker worship might be said to be not so much about silence as about stillness, and silence itself can have very different – and less positive – implications. Silence can be empty or full; it can denote absence or presence. Silence can be a punishment, a withholding. It can be an absence, a loss, a lack of speech through disability or deliberate manipulation. And it can denote secrecy.

Continued on next page ...

Silence in this novel bears many of these meanings: both the contemplative and something more mysterious. At its heart is a young couple living in contemporary London, largely contented but struggling with the usual difficulties of co-habitation and the demands of modern life. The lives of both are complicated. Suzie, a respected financial journalist, is in her secret life a ventriloquist. Her partner Aubrey or Orbs (the narrator), works in a bank, but in his private 'real' life he is also a fool. His practice, alone or with others, is largely silent.

As each struggles both to make a living and to find a fulfilling way of life, and as unexpected events impose even greater challenges, it becomes clear to both Orbs and Suzie that their habits of secrecy and being economical with the truth are blocking their dreams of living an authentic life.

So this is a novel about silence and voices, truth and lies, a novel narrated by a fool – all of which might be considered rather appropriate to the times in which we live.

Although I've only been writing for fifteen years, I now feel impoverished when I am not in the middle of a book. All the more so with fiction, which feels like an accompaniment to my life, or as a novelist friend said, a parallel life. Suzie and Orbs have their parallel lives – and so do I.

Jennifer Kavanagh



Fair Trade for Christmas

As Friends may know we use Fair Trade tea, coffee, biscuits, and – wherever possible – other Fair Trade cooking and cleaning products at the Meeting House throughout the year. In previous years we have promoted Fair Trade goods with a Christmas stall. This year we are not having a stall, but we're encouraging Friends to visit the wonderful Fairtrade Shop at St Michaels in Cornmarket. The shop has an enormous selection of food, fashion, homeware, and gifts from around the world – sold to support fair trade producers everywhere. Do pay them a visit.

 **FAIRTRADE**
 **AT ST. MICHAELS**
FOOD FASHION HOMEWARE GIFTS
<http://www.fairtradeatstmichaels.co.uk/>

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER 2019

All at 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Date	Time	Event
Sun 1 Dec	10:30 - 11:30	Single combined Meeting for Worship
Sun 1 Dec	12:00	Business Meeting
Tues 3 Dec	19:00	First Tuesday Group
Thurs 12 Dec	17:30	Pastoral Care group
Fri 13 Dec	19:00 - 21:00	Friday with Friends: Can we talk about Joy and Celebration?
Sat 14 Dec	10:00 - 16:00	BORM Support Group
Sat 14 Dec	18:30 for 19:00	Poems in the Meeting House: Mince Pies and Puddings
Wed 18 Dec	13.45 - 15:00	Friends Fellowship of Healing
Thurs 19 Dec	19:00 - 21:00	Elder's Meeting
Wed 25 Dec Christmas Day	12:00	Meeting for Worship followed by Bring and Share Lunch

Note: Our last Tuesday Soup lunch is on 17 December at 12:30. Soup Lunch restarts on 14 January.

The office will be closed for the Christmas break from 17:00 on 20 Dec until 9:00 on 6 Jan.

From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

Be honest with yourself. What unpalatable truths might you be evading? When you recognise your shortcomings, do not let that discourage you. In worship together we can find the assurance of God's love and the strength to go on with renewed courage.

Quaker Faith & Practice, Advices & Queries No. 11

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

1st Sunday of each month

10:30am at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

2nd 3rd & 4th Sunday of each month

9:30am & 11:00am at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Monday

7:00pm Young Adult Friends at 43 St Giles
(followed by baked potato supper)

Tuesday & Thursday

7:30am at 43 St Giles
(followed by breakfast at 8:00am)

Wednesday

12:15pm at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Headington LM worship on Sunday

10:00am at The Priory,
85 Old High Street, OX3 9HT

Forty-Three is available online, at
www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter

If you are considering writing an article or notice but would prefer it not to go online, please don't hesitate to contribute it. Just indicate that the piece is not for inclusion in the internet version — no reason will be asked for. Articles and notices are very welcome to appear in the print edition only, and the same applies to calendar items.

*The views expressed in this newsletter
do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.*

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