

Forty-Three newsletter

Number 494
June 2020



Oxford Friends Meeting
43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW

Prepared for the 'New Normal'?

'Be prepared' That's the Scouts isn't it? Just 'Prepared' is the motto of Aston Villa Football Club – though over the seasons the success of that strategy has been highly variable. Frequently two nil down at half time, an analogy for how we might all feel just now in lockdown, we still have time before the final whistle to bounce back!

Nevertheless – being ready, anticipating the worst and the best, and planning for all eventualities is what we have been doing since we closed 43 and the Meeting House on 23 March. Preparing together, involving all as a team as much as we can, increases our chances of success – and we are planning for substantial change ahead. The 'new normal' as it's being styled, may feel far from normal for most. But change is natural whether we like it or not. Better to design your change then?

Small, big, whatever change you can manage is good. And if that sounds a bit scary, take a look in Quaker Faith & Practice (QF&P) 29.02: "*We are a small church with the pretensions to change the world. But first we have to let God change us – to empower us to be better Friends, and more active in our own work.*" If we are to change the world we'd better get on with it, with small steps, and preferably in the company of our Friends. Honda used to have a lovely advert that went "*hate*

something, change something, make something better". I went round singing it for weeks and then bought a Honda because I bought into the concept, if you like, of good thoughtful practical and affordable design. That's what we need just now: good practical thoughtful discernment on the way ahead.

If you are still scared just think about being a seed. One minute you are snuggled down in warm moist earth minding your own business – and the next? You're a blooming shoot! Up there and flourishing. Who knew? And who knew that we could become zoommeisters?

Five years ago we adopted a fresh logo for the Meeting House and 43. That's it up at the top left of this page! It's a series of interlocking circles – almost looks like Qs but is a whole pattern or community of circles. It's also open-sided, representing not just us but all those groups and individuals who come together under our rainbow umbrella, under our roof. Are you reminded of 'patterns and examples'? Good. You were meant to be. It reminded me of "*I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles*" (Rufus Jones QF&P 24.56). That seems to fit what we try to offer: quiet processes and small circles.

So in planning Life After Lockdown, it felt time to take a fresh look at our circles. I took the pieces of

Deadline for contributions to the July 2020 issue: Monday 15 June

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.

the circles to devise a new logo for our garden – such a vital resource for our wellbeing. Does it almost resemble a courtyard? A Celtic cross? I wonder how it feels to you? Then I’ve been looking at more patterns and examples – those created by the many groups and individuals who walk through our door. Many and varied therapists, art, music and writing groups, health and wellbeing organisations, campaigning and special focus groups. It feels like a richly woven fabric we have made together. Beautiful and useful indeed.

This strange and tragic time has given us an opportunity to be creative because we have had time to reflect: to look, and look again, and plan and prepare for what is needed. Not 'right ordering', which sounds like stock-taking or always only buying what’s on the shopping list (how boring!), but perhaps 'right responding'? Yes. Right responding feels more spirit-led, informed, alive, and impulsive.

We have begun zoomed conversations across the meeting on life after lockdown because we need to hear and share ideas, concerns, reflections. We must pool our imaginations to see what rises up from the deep. We can use our skills to examine and change our structures, improve our relevance.

And if all this seems exhausting ? Well, remember ‘a change is as good as a rest’ !

Deb Arrowsmith



Peaceful Garden
Central Oxford

This is our fresh statement on opening up again – our commitment to serve if you like:

“Oxford Quaker Meeting House offers support to, and draws support from, organisations, groups and individuals that make up the fabric of our society – a fabric that is religious, spiritual and meditative, campaigning, active and concerned, social, supportive and educational. The fabric lets our lives speak our values of peace, simplicity, sustainability, equality, and truth.”



Silver Linings

Who would have believed this time last year that the homeless men and women we regularly saw sleeping in doorways, or under bridges, could and would be, a year later, comfortably and safely housed? Following a central government directive of 26 March 2020, Oxford City Council secured 121 rooms in hotels and student accommodation to house all those sleeping rough.

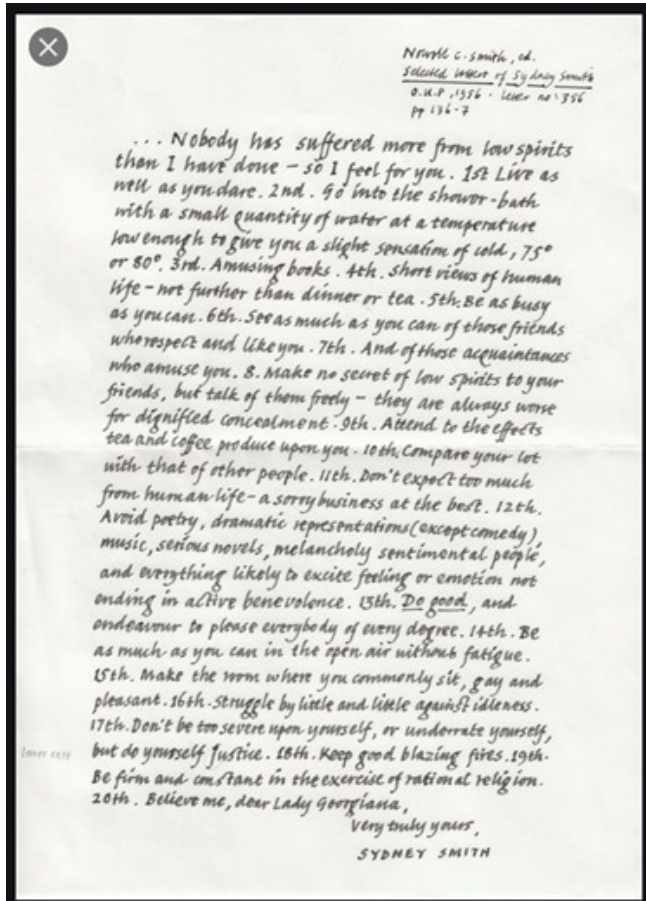
And in order to help to self-isolate, from 4 April Pembroke College has teamed up with the Council to provide breakfast and two hot meals a day. Pembroke's head chef and his team have delivered over 15,000 meals to 120 people in five different locations around the city – a logistical challenge involving 1750 packs of cereal, 821 one-pint milk cartons and 120 kilos of mashed potatoes each week.

It all goes to show that given the will, the funds, and the right attitude, no-one has to sleep rough or go hungry in our beautiful privileged city – and that even coronavirus has a silver lining.

Elisabeth Salisbury

Sydney Smith on 'Low Spirits'

Rev Sydney Smith (1771-1845) was a hugely popular English writer, preacher, and lecturer. Below is part of a letter (and transcription) that he wrote in 1820 to Lady Georgiana Cavendish, daughter of the Duke of Devonshire, advising her on how to cope with depression.



8. Make no secret of low spirits to your friends, but talk of them freely — they are always worse for dignified concealment.

9th. Attend to the effects tea and coffee produce upon you.

10th. Compare your lot with that of other people.

11th. Don't expect too much from human life — a sorry business at the best.

12th. Avoid poetry, dramatic representations (except comedy), music, serious novels, melancholy, sentimental people, and everything likely to excite feeling or emotion not ending in active benevolence.

13th. Do good, and endeavour to please everybody of every degree.

14th. Be as much as you can in the open air without fatigue.

15th. Make the room where you commonly sit, gay and pleasant.

16th. Struggle by little and little against idleness.

17th. Don't be too severe upon yourself, or underrate yourself, but do yourself justice.

18th. Keep good blazing fires.

19th. Be firm and constant in the exercise of rational religion.

20th. Believe me, dear Lady Georgiana,

Very truly yours,
SYDNEY SMITH

shared by Catherine Hilliard

Dear Lady Georgiana,

... Nobody has suffered more from low spirits than I have done, so I feel for you.

1st Live as well as you dare.

2nd. Go into the shower-bath with a small quantity of water at a temperature low enough to give you a slight sensation of cold, 75° or 80°.

3rd. Amusing books.

4th. Short views of human life — not further than dinner or tea.

5th. Be as busy as you can.

6th. See as much as you can of those friends who respect and like you.

7th. And of those acquaintances who amuse you.



Lockdown Ennui

Seven weeks or is it eight? I've lost track, but this much I know – whatever novelty lockdown had at the outset has, for me, long since disappeared. Now every day seems much the same as the last and without holidays, days out and meetings with Ffriends to look forward to, I see the future as a grey featureless miasma stretching to infinity. Hmm. That sounds pretty downbeat, doesn't it? Well yes, but that's how I've been feeling lately. I call it lockdown ennui. And what makes it worse is that my lockdown ennui is inexcusable – I have much to be grateful for.

As often happens, I was pondering these thoughts in meeting last Wednesday and it occurred to me that lockdown ennui is a very unquakerly concept. After all, most Quakers would probably agree that every day is sacred, so how can I justify waking in the morning and thinking that I face a grey new day with nothing to set it apart from yesterday or tomorrow? The truth is I can't, and I shouldn't. In fact, as I thought more, I realised that within those grey lockdown days, if I looked carefully enough, I could see tiny sparkling gems of inspiration and achievement.

The gems were very tiny, like the pinpricks of light created by the stars in the night sky, but they were enough to make a difference and remind me that, even in lockdown, every day is different, every day has its bright spots – however tiny they may be – and every day is sacred.

Ha! All of that sounds very worthy doesn't it? I expect you're thinking I'll tell you next that this inspiration has banished my lockdown ennui forever, and now I'm living a happy joyous life while feeling totally confident about the future. Sadly, it isn't so. I still wake every morning disappointed by

the knowledge that we're in lockdown and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. I'm still missing the holidays, the days out and the meetings with Ffriends.

But I do feel a little better because I remember and relish those tiny gems – with the prospect of more to come – and because I can draw strength and inspiration from the idea that every day is sacred and special. In a nutshell, the thoughts I had in meeting help me and I hope they might help others, however slightly, but I would never claim them to be a panacea.



In case you were wondering – and I know you probably weren't – what form my tiny sparkling gems take, I'm pleased to give you one example. I've been writing professionally now for well over three decades and, in all that time, despite my best efforts, I've never managed to fit the word 'ennui' into anything I've written. Well I've really cracked that now, haven't I? And, sad though it may sound, that has given me a feeling of satisfaction!

May your sparkling gems be bigger and brighter, Ffriends, and please stay safe.

Keith Wilson

Children's Meetings via Zoom

Our meeting's two children's meetings (Beansprouts for age 0-4, and Sunflowers for age 4-12) have continued to meet online throughout the pandemic.

Sunflowers

Activities have included: an egg hunt; finding things that give us happiness and hope in our homes; making rainbows as a sign of hope; making an image to express what 'peace' means to us; an exploration of equality in Quaker marriage; and imagining what we we would include in a new Quaker society on another planet.

Below, we share some images of puppets and props from our puppet play, about Quaker banker Jonathan Backhouse outwitting Lord Darlington in order to fund the first Stockton-Darlington railway.



Matthew Gee



Beansprouts During Lockdown

Every Sunday afternoon since the lockdown started, the Beansprouts have each purloined their parents' laptops and engaged in erudite dissection of current events – with a generous helping of Quaker spirituality for good measure. Whenever their parents enter the room, however, they revert to

being excitable, distracted, typical two-year-olds. To placate them, their parents have now read every storybook in existence and resorted to writing their own, like the soon-to-be-bestseller a few pages of which are featured below.

Thomas Gaston



A Creative Lockdown Project

I was reflecting during afterwords on Sunday that – in contrast to many other people – I had more contact with people I don't know this week than I would normally do. When I explained the reason for this to Friends, I was encouraged to share the story of my creative lockdown project.

Given it is unlikely that theatres would be open in time for my partner and me to make use of the birthday-present tickets I had bought her for Jack Thorne's play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, I thought I would make the most of

lockdown and make her something instead. I was inspired by a story from Eric Roberts and Lauren Rusk that I heard some years ago. One of their friends had created an audiobook as a present for her partner, by arranging to record their friends each reading aloud chapters of the partner's favourite books (the Narnia series). With this as my starting point, I decided to see if I could convince my partner's friends and family to record an audio version of the Harry Potter play.

I found a copy of the script and, most importantly, enlisted the help of my partner's brother, a sound technician! Then it was time to see whether anyone else was willing to join me on the adventure. I reached out to our mutual friends and as much of her family as I already know, and then went on a mission to talk to other people. I am not always a fan of technology, but I did admit to myself as I scrolled through her list of Facebook friends that IT sometimes has advantages — that is until Facebook thought I was a computer spamming people, and stopped allowing me to send messages...

That being said, having sent the call out on 1 May, by 3 May I had responses from a total of 35 people who had willingly agreed to give up their free time

to help me with this project. This includes an amazing range of people, from those currently furloughed to doctors working in intensive care. The responses I have received have been absolutely amazing and so heart-warming it has brought tears to my eyes.

The message I want to leave with everyone is that

there are still chances to go out and meet new people, just not necessarily in the ways you may have originally imagined. Be creative, have fun – and people will join you and make you smile.



Quaker Faith & Practice 21.25: *Perhaps the most neglected of all the advices is that we should live adventurously. If there is one wish I would pray the Spirit to put in our Christmas stockings, it is warmth, openness, passion, a bit of emotion that doesn't mind making a fool of itself occasionally.* (Gerald Priestland, 1977).

Rhiannon Smith

In Memoriam

For all the keyworkers, carers, and NHS staff who have sadly lost their lives in the COVID-19 pandemic – with acknowledgements to Edna St Vincent Millay:

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve.

AND I AM NOT RESIGNED*.

from *Dirge Without Music*

by Edna St Vincent Millay

*ES's upper-case emphasis

shared by Elisabeth Salisbury



Light Will Return

One day,
We shall hug each other in the streets
Just as we did after the war.

One day,
Joyful runners will throng the parklands,
And build each other up
With cries of encouragement
And high fives.

One day,
Musicians will fill the streets with beautiful sounds,
And we shall listen, transported,
And toss coins of gratitude.

But today,
We must put aside for a while these delights
Apprehend what they meant,
Anticipate their rebirth.

Today,
We must send affection waving at webcams,
And socialise in two dimensions
And discover that cyberspace, too, is real.

Today,
Our sports are solitary forays on empty paths,
The pounding of one pair of feet, or the bicycle wheel's
whirring.
Our competitors are virtual buddies known through an app.

Today,
Our songs are sung on YouTube
Our live music streamed from musicians' homes,
Our dancing at two-metres' distance.

But maybe, in this constraint we can find joy,
In the reality of our connectedness
And in the knowing that light will return,

One day.

Iain Strachan

Even Boris!

It was a perfect Sunday morning. The garden at Forty-Three was gorgeous in the sunlight, and I sat contentedly reading. A Friend emerging from the 9:30 meeting wandered over. “We had some interesting ministry this morning,” they said. “We were reminded that there’s that of God in everyone.” I’d only been attending meetings for a couple of months, but even I knew that this was an almost universal Quaker belief, so I was surprised to hear it described as interesting ministry.

But the Friend went on. “We were also reminded that it applies to politicians.” This wasn’t intended as a joke, and it took a minute or two to process. It’s easy to think of politicians – especially the ones you don’t agree with – as self-serving, callous, and anything but Godly. I used to do it all the time, and I still do when I forget myself. Yet as a Quaker (or even as an attender, as I was then) I realised I couldn’t be selective. Even politicians have that of God in them.

All of this came to mind this morning after I read an extended investigative article in *The Sunday Times*. It explained how Boris Johnson’s actions – or, more often, lack of actions – had resulted in tens of thousands more people dying from Covid-19 in the UK than would have died had he acted more promptly on the advice his scientific advisors had given to him. I feel bitter about this, and I’m sure I would feel even more bitter, by several orders of magnitude, had I lost someone close to me as a result of Boris’ inaction.

But does that mean Boris is a bad person? Does it mean that there is nothing of God in him? Another memory stirred, this time the wise words of the Imam at a local mosque. “There is no such thing as a bad person,” he told me, “only an ordinary person who does bad things.” And that’s how I see Boris. Who knows what pressures he was under to keep the country going, to keep the taxes low, and to achieve the almost impossible feat of making Brexit look as if it had been a Good Thing? He was and is just a man who responded to those pressures by making bad decisions.



In case I’m starting to sound like a Boris apologist, let me make it clear that I’m not. He must take the responsibility for his decisions. He is culpable. I detest his policies and his attitudes, and he will never win my vote. But does any of that make him a bad person? To my mind, the answer is ‘no’ because, like all of us, he has that of God in him. For that reason, I will be holding Boris in the light. He needs and deserves that much. And maybe, just maybe, it will help him not only to discern a route to the future that genuinely benefits us all, but also give him the courage to take that route. I hope so.

Keith Wilson



And of course history supports the idea that while very early Quakers expected everyone to see the light and join Friends, they came to accept that this wasn't happening (rather as earlier Christians came to accept that Jesus wasn't going to come to earth in an imminent Last Day). In fact this led, happily, to greater tolerance on both sides. Mosedale Meeting House in the Lake District has window-shutters that could be closed from inside if a stone-throwing mob could be heard approaching, whereas Burford's has tall glazed windows and no shutters that I could see.

Similarly, while early Friends said or wrote unfriendly words about 'steeplehouses', it was not much later that Friends in Oxfordshire were making or maintaining clocks on parish-church-towers, as well as making the very plain wall-clocks you can see in the Oxford History of Science Museum on Broad Street.

And of course we are all likely to have friends belonging to other churches whom we admire as good and loving people, and to support charities not necessarily started by Quakers but which do work we are glad to support.

Oh well, I seem to remember that Quaker Faith & Practice is published "for the comfort and discomfort of Friends"...so perhaps 19.22 comes under this heading...

Patricia Wright



George Fox: Not an Ecumenical Person

From time to time it's struck me that occasionally George Fox was not an attractive personality, and that if I'd met him my first impulse would have been to run away. Certainly Quaker Faith & Practice 19.22 (see box) suggests that he wouldn't have supported ecumenism or interfaith action by Friends, like supporting, let alone hosting, the annual World Day of Prayer.

Quaker Faith & Practice 19.22

From this experience of worship comes the Quaker understanding of the church as being formed and led by the spirit. George Fox wrote:

We need no mass for to teach us, and we need not your common prayer, for the Spirit that gave forth the scriptures teacheth us how to pray, sing, fast, and to give thanks... The true faith changeth not, which is the gift of God, and a mystery held in a pure conscience... Our faith, our church, our unity in the Spirit, and our Word, at which we tremble, was in the beginning before your church-made faiths, and our unity, church and fellowship will stand when they are all ended.

Britain Yearly Meeting. Quaker faith & practice (Kindle Locations 5137-5141). Britain Yearly Meeting. Kindle Edition.

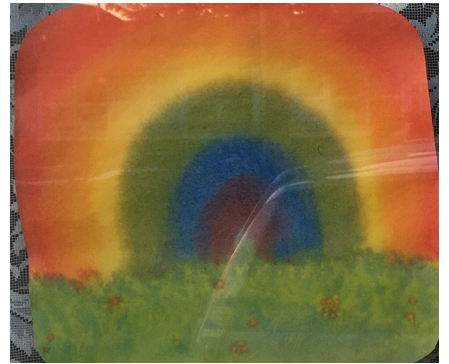
CALENDAR FOR JUNE 2020

During the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, most meetings and events are being held via Zoom-Rooms.

Please contact the office for more details.

Email: oxford@oxfordquakers.org

Telephone: +44 (0)1865 557373



From Quaker Faith and Practice
No moment of silence is a waste of time.
Rachel Needham, 1987
QF&P 2.17

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Please note that for the time being, most meetings for worship are via Zoom-Rooms. For more information, contact the office at office@oxfordquakers.org +44 (0)1865 557373

1st Sunday of each month
10:30

2nd 3rd & 4th Sunday of each month
9:30 & 11:00

Monday
19:00 Young Adult Friends

Tuesday & Thursday
19:30

Wednesday
12:15

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. The same applies to calendar items.

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

Editorial Team:
SHERRY GRANUM, JULIET HENDERSON,
and ALEX SMITH
(Joint Editing and Production);

DEB ARROWSMITH, JACQUI MANSFIELD, and MAX HOWELLS
(Calendar and Distribution)