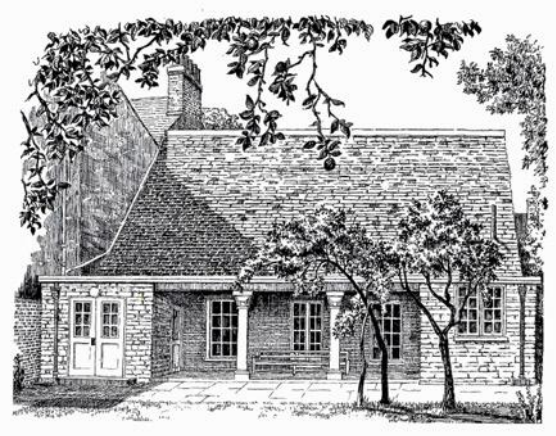
# Forty-Three Newsletter

Number 559
November 2025



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## A Quaker Perspective on Trump's America

**Eric Roberts**

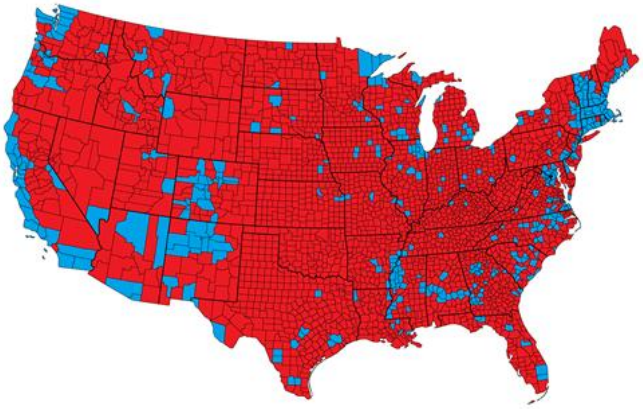
At their annual summer picnic in August, Headington Friends Meeting asked me to share my thoughts about the profoundly scary political situation in the United States in which a majority of Americans cast their votes for an entirely unprincipled and manifestly corrupt candidate who now seems hell-bent on destroying democracy both at home and abroad.

As Ezra Klein wrote in *Why We're Polarized*, most analyses of the 2016 election ignored the most important question by focusing instead on how the outcome would have shifted in Hillary Clinton's favour if only a small number of voters in just a few states had voted the other way. "Rather than asking how Trump won," Klein writes, "we should be asking how Trump was close enough to win. How did a candidate like Trump—a candidate who radiated contempt for the party he represented and unfitness for the job he sought—get within a few thousand votes of the presidency in the first place?"

My talk in Headington looked at this deeper question from the perspective of a person who had grown up in a rural state that usually votes for Republican candidates. Political commentators have offered insightful commentaries on this phenomenon for several decades. Along with recent books like Rachel Maddow's *Prequel: An American Fight Against Fascism* and Anne Applebaum's *Twilight of Democracy*, I recommended several older books and articles, including Tom Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas* and Dale Maharidge's article "Rust & Rage in the Heartland" in *The Nation,* both from 2004.

A major conclusion of these analyses is that wealth and power have migrated from the country as a whole to a highly educated urban elite who have the skills that drive today's economy. On the other hand, people working in the vast farmlands of the American Midwest or the dying remnants of the industrial economy of the last century are struggling to live paycheck to paycheck and can't fathom how people on the coasts live in multimillion-dollar houses and can afford to eat out so often. Their elected representatives—typically Republican in rural areas—have convinced them that their suffering is the result of Democratic policies. Trump and his supporters in Congress have weaponised that resentment to cement their political control.

The degree to which geography determines voting patterns is illustrated by this map (next page) in which Republican counties are red and Democratic ones are blue:



Presidential voting patterns for 2024 in US counties.

I grew up in Nevada, the state just to the east of California, in which the only Democratic county is the one containing Las Vegas, a city whose population is larger than that of Portland, Oregon, where we now live. The state itself is more than half again as large in area as the United Kingdom, almost entirely composed of ranches and small towns. For decades now, I have gone back to Nevada during presidential elections because I can make a real difference there, given that California and Oregon are reliably Democratic and Nevada is a "purple state" in which the results shift. In 2024, I was assigned canvassing duty in rural Douglas County, where most of the houses were clearly in the Trump column, as evidenced by these yard signs.


Douglas County yard signs. Photo: Eric Roberts

Although the cities of Las Vegas and Reno both voted for Harris, the state as a whole voted for Trump, as my experience campaigning in the state predicted.

After giving my talk, however, I realised that I might also have been focusing on the wrong question, much as Ezra Klein argues is true for analyses of the 2016 race. In Headington, I talked about why people in Nevada had voted for a manifestly unqualified and dangerous president. It was equally important for me to ask why I, having grown up in the same state and attending the same schools as many of today's Trump voters, had taken a different path. What was different about my upbringing that enabled me to see the world differently?

Although some of my political and social perspective was undoubtedly shaped by my experiences after Nevada, my reflections after the talk convinced me that my Quaker connections as a child mattered most. My grandmother Ruth Roberts was one of my most important influences growing up, and I was so proud of her decision to work in Germany with the American Friends Service Committee after World War II, where she ran the Quaker Student House in Freiburg.

Left: Freiburg Quaker Student House. Right: Ruth Roberts.

It was learning from the example of my grandmother, attending the Reno Meeting throughout secondary school, and taking part in AFSC conferences for young friends in Pacific Yearly Meeting that shaped my political perspective in later years. With that realisation, it became clear that an essential part of our responsibility in the Society of Friends is to live our lives so that they serve as models for the generations that follow.

## "I Predict a Riot": A TV review, with added ramblings

**Nicole Gilroy**

As a native of West Yorkshire I can't help but be a superfan of Sally Wainwright. Every TV drama she's written is astutely observed, brutally funny and has a strong sense of place. I first discovered her work in the outrageous yet true Yorkshire lesbian love story of *Gentleman Jack,* aka Anne Lister, but it didn't stop there.

As someone who's spent their entire working life in Oxford feeling a bit common, it is an absolute joy to hear the flat vowels and unapologetic regional flavour of the voices in *Last Tango in Halifax, Happy Valley* and now, the utterly delicious *Riot Women*. It was released last week, but as I am not blessed with many fruits of the Spirit, and certainly not with temperance or self-control, I binge-watched the whole series in one evening on BBC iPlayer.

*Riot Women* tells the story of a group of menopausal women who form a rock group. In fact there are several younger women also in the rock group, but appropriately they are cast as "just the backing singers". Even without the Wainwright credentials this series appealed to me because I have a friend who has formed a punk band in Leicester. This friend is in her mid-fifties, and is the Head of Conservation at the Church of England's Cathedral and Church Buildings Division, a sub-committee of which I sit on as advisor on books and manuscript collections.

Again, as a northerner of distinctly working-class roots, and even worse, as a born Roman Catholic, a convinced Quaker and a not-entirely-convinced agnostic, I suffer from a reasonable amount of imposter syndrome every time I walk past Westminster Abbey and enter Church House for the committee meetings with their very lavish sandwich lunches. I keep expecting some clerk of some sort to sniff out my papish roots and non-conformist tendencies and frogmarch me out of the building. But this woman is also a northerner, and a mother of a son with special educational needs, and she's in a punk band, and her presence gives me a sense of safety and solidarity and that we are more than that which we are not.

*But there is a strength of spirit in creativity and self-expression, particularly when it is done in community*

Watching Riot Women generated feelings of anger, sorrow, horror and joy. In one of the opening scenes, a highly experienced teacher explains to her younger, male manager that she had the previous night attempted to kill herself, as a result of feeling entirely invisible and unappreciated yet also indispensable for the care of her mother who has dementia, the children she teaches, the son who forgets her until he needs something. The manager is patronising and dismissive, and she is not surprised. Other women in the group are in situations of active abuse, homelessness, workplace harassment, burnout. Several are carers, and none have support from the men in their lives, most of whom create additional burdens if not outright danger.

The women form a band. It is life-changing. It doesn't change their lives but it gives them hope and a way to feel alive. They write songs about women's health, or lack of it, about their ex-husbands, about their abuse. Their problems do not go away. Many of them get worse. But in between the crises, the women text each other to arrange rehearsals, recording sessions, gigs.

I am one of a group of women which formed via a Carers Oxfordshire course on storytelling called The Shortest Distance, from Patti Digh's comment that "the shortest distance between two people is a story". The members of the group are all women, not by intention but because most carers are women, and certainly the carers who reach out for support from other carers, and then keep in touch for years after, are all women.

The course was quite short but years later we continue to meet by zoom to try and create things.

This week our group WhatsApp chat consisted of one women telling us her son was seriously ill in hospital, and others advising from experience on the best ICUs for the specific problem he has. Another is juggling two children, one with very complex needs and challenging behaviour, whose husband has developed a terminal illness and who needed support with the idea of her daughter moving to a different school. I was chipping in to the conversation in between sweeping up broken glass and juggling police and social workers. We were planning a zoom meeting to talk about novel writing. Not one of us has the time or energy to write a novel, but someone went on a course and wants to share their learning and we want to hear. We are having our meeting anyway, even though we know it will be interrupted by the needs of our relatives, even though lots of us will be late, even though what we produce might not be very good.

But there is a strength of spirit in creativity and self-expression, particularly when it is done in community, with like-minded people who are supporting each other both through and despite the traumas of their everyday lives. We may not be the *Riot Women* but we are radical storytellers, and the telling of our stories is what keeps us alive.

And finally: there are many real-life Riot Women bands - our local one is The HorMones, based in East Oxford. Go see them if you can. Maybe someone will form a Silent Quaker Punk band?

horMOMES gig. Photo: Nicole Gilroy

## Remember Hadija?

**Paschal Matonda and Marg Paton**

A young girl supported through the Tabora League for Children Orphans and Vulnerable Children (TLC OVC) programme was unable to walk. Two club feet and skin flap connecting thighs and ankles left her crippled, and unable to straighten her legs. Her family, already struggling to meet daily needs, could not afford the surgery she desperately required. She spent her days watching other children play, longing for a chance to run and laugh with them.

Hadija as a young child.

Everything changed when TLC intervened. Through the OVC sponsorship initiative, the child received full medical support, including surgery (29 operations), hospital care for a year in Ethiopia and physiotherapy (all provided freely by Dr Tim and his Charity). TLC flew Hadija, her mother and Adrian, then a TLC Form 4 graduate, to Addis Ababa. Adrian was needed as an English translator as Mum and Hadija only spoke Swahili and very few people in Addis knew any Kiswahili. TLC paid for Adrian's stay near the hospital. With continued rehabilitation and encouragement, she gradually gained strength and confidence.

Today, aged 13, she walks independently, full of joy and energy. She can join other children playing together and proudly participates with her peers. She is excited about starting Secondary School in January. She sleeps with her legs in splints to keep them straight. Hadija will be attending CCBRT Hospital in Dar es Salaam 500 miles from Tabora, to get new splints in the December school holidays as she has outgrown her current ones. This trip will cost TLC £600 as Hadija and her Mum need to stay for a week in Dar.

"*I never thought I would walk, now I can run and play. TLC gave me a new life*" she said with a bright smile.

This story is a shining example of what compassion can do. Every contribution to TLC helps transform pain into possibility – turning despair into hope for many vulnerable children.

Hadija today.

Authors: Paschal Matonda is TLC Exec Director and Marg Paton is a UK Trustee.

## The Group Work Grinch

**Keith Wilson**

Friends may have noticed – or, in fact, may not have noticed – I rarely take part in Quaker discussion groups and exploratory sessions. Is this because I'm uninterested? Or perhaps because I don't want to make the effort to turn up? If I'm being totally honest, the answer to both of those questions is sometimes yes, but there's a much more frequent reason for my avoidance of discussion groups and the like. And that reason is group work.

It seems to me that group work is almost a compulsory part of every Quaker discussion meeting that involves more than the merest handful of people. But those dread words "Let's break into small groups and discuss this topic in more detail" make my stomach churn and it's only feigned politeness (and the general decrepitude of old age!) that stops me making a run for the door.

Why do I dislike group work so much? I've thought hard about this. It's certainly not because I'm afraid of speaking out. If that were true, I wouldn't be writing this piece for *Forty-Three*. And it's not because I don't like the sound of my own voice; I will gladly address the largest audience on any topic I'm bold enough to think I understand.

No, I've concluded a key part of the answer is that I dislike group work because I'm not in the least competitive and, in virtually every group work discussion I've ever been involved with, one member of the group has quickly come to dominate. I'm not really interested in raising a challenge; clearly, they feel that they have something important to contribute and who am I to gainsay that? So, I tend to sit quietly and listen, while squirming uncomfortably and feeling that more is expected of me.

Then there's another problem, which is almost the opposite of the first. That's when someone says, "now let's hear what Keith has to say." All eyes turn on me expectantly but, unfortunately, I may have nothing to say, especially if the dominant member of the group has set out their views rather forcibly and I'm still reeling from the impact. I know the Quaker approach to decision making says I'm entitled to have my voice heard, but maybe my brain hasn't worked quickly enough for me to come up with an instant – and coherent – response. So, there I am, squirming again while I desperately try to think of something to say so that will at least get me off the hook.

In summary, I find group work daunting, uncomfortable and unsettling. Does that mean I think it should be avoided? I think I should avoid it, and I do, but in more general terms it certainly seems that Quakers find it useful. If they didn't, surely they wouldn't make it a part of almost every discussion meeting. My conclusion is that group work has its place, but I would most earnestly call on those who organise and run meetings to bear in mind that it doesn't suit everyone. Please offer an opt-out option or an alternative. Unless, of course, I really am the only group work grinch in the meeting!

## The Answer

I heard the sea and asked,
"What language is that?"
The sea replied,
"The language of eternal questions"

I saw the sky and asked,
"What holds the answer?"
The sky replied,
"The language of eternal silence."

**Rabrindanath Tagore**
from *On the Shores of Eternity* (ed. Deepak Chopra, 1999).

## The Stars Look On

The day will come
When the sight of this earth will be lost.
I will take my leave in silence
As the stars look on.

I know the sun will rise again
The hours will still bring pleasure and pain
In heaving waves

When I think of the end, time crumbles.
I see by the light of death
That the lowliest creature is rare
And the worst moments are precious.

What I longed for will be set aside
The things I pursued in vain
Let them pass
Let me turn
To things I overlooked
And carelessly threw away
To possess them truly until they are mine

As the stars look on.

**Rabrindanath Tagore**
from *On the Shores of Eternity* (ed. Deepak Chopra, 1999).

Selected by Chris Gaal

## John Macmurray and 'the you-and-I'

**Jeanne Warren**

Jeanne Warren has an article in the latest edition of the magazine "Philosophy *Now*", which calls itself 'a magazine of ideas'. The short article, titled "Macmurray on Relationship", is about one of the core ideas of the philosopher John Macmurray, namely that relationships between people are a core element of being a person. For too long, philosophical thinking has started from thinking about the isolated 'I' rather than the 'you-and-I', as Macmurray prefers.

John Macmurray lived for some years at Jordans in Buckinghamshire. This was after he retired and joined the Society of Friends, but he had also lived there for a time during World War II, when he was a professor of philosophy at University College London. There is a biography of him in the library at '43'. He also gave the Swarthmore Lecture in 1965, called "Search for Reality in Religion".

## November Collection: Friends World Committee for Consultation


"*Do you welcome the diversity of culture, language and expressions of faith in our yearly meeting and in the world community of Friends? Seek to increase your understanding and to gain from this rich heritage and wide range of spiritual insights. Uphold your own and other yearly meetings in your prayers.*"

- Advices and Queries 16

Last month, the Sunflowers children's meeting explored the theme of *community*, including the *World Quaker Day* all-age meeting for worship on the theme of loving our neighbour. This month's collection continues this theme, supporting **Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)** — the international organisation that connects Quakers around the world.

**The World Family of Friends**

Quakers are a diverse worldwide family. Around the world, Friends worship in different ways: some, like us, gather in stillness, in waiting worship; whilst most worship in other styles, including singing hymns, sharing Bible readings, or hearing prepared messages from pastors. There are diverse understandings and experience of God, Christ and the Bible. The majority of Friends in the world are from low and middle income countries (around 30-35% of the world's Quakers live in Kenya).

**Why Support FWCC?**

Your donations help FWCC to:

- Foster links between Quaker meetings worldwide
- Enable Young Adult Friends from around the world to connect and new communities to grow
- Share Quaker witness for peace, equality and care for creation
- Keep us connected across cultures, languages and traditions

FWCC offers a powerful example of how we can be connected together as a global community—beyond distance, difference, and doctrine.

**How to Donate:**

You can support FWCC in several ways:

**By Cheque:**
Make payable to *Friends World Committee for Consultation* and send to:
FWCC World Office, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2AX, UK.

**By Bank Transfer (BACS):**

Account name: Friends World Committee for Consultation
Account number: 65010116
Sort code: 08-90-61
IBAN: GB62 CPBK 089061 65010116
SWIFT: CPBKGB22

**Online:**
Visit fwcc.world/donate to give by card or set up a regular donation.

Matthew Gee, on behalf of the Sunflowers children's meeting

## Oxford Meeting Notices

**OX2 Coffee Mornings**
OX2 Friends have sometimes expressed regret that we no longer hold monthly coffee mornings. The difficulty seems to be that holding them in our own homes is less practical than it used to be. However, OX1 holds monthly morning events in the Meeting House Garden Room. The Office tells me that we would be welcome to do the same, particularly if it could be a Monday or Friday. The bus services would suit most of us. If anyone in OX2 would like to join in I'd be happy to get it going in the first instance (not necessarily too soon).
**Richard Seebohm**

**All-Age Meeting for Worship – Sunday 7th December, 10:30am**
We will hold our next all-age meeting for worship on Sunday 7th December at 10:30am. Friends from across our meetings - from the 9:30 and 11:00 meetings, and the Beansprouts and Sunflowers children's meetings - will all come together as one community to share in worship.
We hope this all-age meeting will offer an opportunity to experience connection and hope in our community, as we worship across the generations - through story, song, sharing, silence and spoken ministry - reminding us all of the value that each part of our worshipping community contributes to the whole.
We look forward to sharing more details, including the theme, in the December newsletter — and to seeing you there.
**Matthew Gee**

**Second formatting editor for "43"**
Since taking on the formatting editor role for 43 in the summer I have had some ill health which is making it more difficult for me to fulfil the role reliably. If any Friends would be willing to share the role with me I would be very grateful.

You just need basic Word editing skills and a can-do attitude! Please get in touch if you're interested in learning more about the role:
essjay.spencer@gmail.com
**SJ Spencer**

Friends International Centre, Nairobi Yearly Meeting, Kenya. *Photo: Matthew Gee*

## Diary

**Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting (OSAM)**
Saturday 8th November, 10:00am-3:00pm
Swindon Friends Meeting House.
https://osamquakers.org.uk/about-osam/

The Meeting for Church Affairs will start at 10:30 am, and there will be a spiritual nurture session in the afternoon.

**Communicating Truthfully, Equally, and Effectively**
Saturday 15th November 9:30am-4:30pm
Meeting House
https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/courses/communicating-truthfully-equally-and-effectively/

**Forest Foxes Nature Social**
**(for 11-14 year olds)**
Saturday 19th November, 2:00pm – 4.30pm, Hill End Outdoor Education Centre.
Please contact Julia Dover juliad@quaker.org.uk to book by Tuesday 25th November.

**All-Age Meeting for Worship**
Sunday 7th December 2025, 10:30am, Meeting House.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/all-age-mfw/

## Looking further ahead

**Britain Yearly Meeting**
1st - 4th May 2026, Friends House, London, and via Zoom

**Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting (OSAM)**
Saturday 10th January 2026, 10:00am-3:00pm
Oxford Friends Meeting House.
https://osamquakers.org.uk/about-osam/

The Meeting for Church Affairs will start at 10:30am; there will be a special **all-age spiritual nurture session** in the afternoon based around dance and singing.

## Regular Events

**Beansprouts Children's Meeting** (under 4s)
Sundays – 10:30am (first Sunday), 11:00am (others), Long Room.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/beansprouts/

**Sunflowers Children's Meeting** (school-age)
*Theme for November: Peace*
Sundays – 10:30am (first Sunday), 11:00am (others), Short Room.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/sunflowers/

**Young Adult Friends Meeting (18-35)**
Mondays – 7:00pm, Meeting House. Followed by dinner at 8:00pm in the Garden Room.
https://oxfordquakers.org/youngadultfriends/

**Tea Cake and Play**
*Friendly stay-and-play for babies, toddlers and their grown-ups.*
Tuesdays, 10:00am–12:00pm, Meeting House.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/baby-and-toddler-group/

## Volunteer Service Opportunities

**Children's Meeting Helpers**
*Support Beansprouts or Sunflowers at 11:00 meetings.*
Speak to a CYPC member. DBS and references required.

**Tea Cake and Play Volunteers**
*Help run Tuesday stay-and-play sessions.*
Contact Sally Lawson:
playgroupsupport@oxfordquakers.org

**Welcomers for Sunday 11:00 Meetings**
*Provide a warm welcome to all who worship with us.*
Contact Paul Fine: paul.fine@lshtm.ac.uk / 07854 618146

## Quaker Video of the Month

**“Bayard Rustin and Quaker Practice in New York City”.**

Prof. Sarah Azaransky, Associate Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, New York City.


## From Quaker Faith & Practice 28.07
## Sharing the Quaker Experience

*‘Have you anything to declare?’ is a vital challenge to which every one of us is personally called to respond and is also a challenge that every meeting should consider of primary importance. It should lead us to define, with such clarity as we can reach, precisely what it is that Friends of this generation have to say that is not, as we believe, being said effectively by others.*

Edgar G Dunstan, 1956

# November 2025

Many meetings and events are held via Zoom. Link for all Oxford Meetings for Worship:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87383304611?pwd=Vkkya2ZweVVRZjRmOE1JVDBFdTdwUT09

Please contact the Office for more details:
Email: office@oxfordquakers.org Telephone: +44 (0)1865 557373

## OXFORD MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Meetings for worship are in person. Zoom connections are available only when indicated.
For more information, contact the Office at
office@oxfordquakers.org +44 (0)1865 557373

**First Sunday of each month:**
Meeting for Worship 10:30-11:30 (in person & Zoom)
MfW for Business 12:15 (in person & Zoom)

**All other Sundays:**
Meetings for Worship 09:30-10:15 (in person and Zoom)
11:00-12:00 (in person and Zoom)

**Monday:**
Young Adult Friends 19:00-21:00 (in person and Zoom)

**Tuesday:**
Meeting for Worship followed by breakfast 07:30-08:00

**Wednesday:**
Meeting for Worship followed by lunch 11:45-12:30

**Thursday:**
Meeting for Worship followed by breakfast 07:30-08:00

## HEADINGTON MEETING FOR WORSHIP

Headington Meeting meets each Sunday at 10:00
at Old Headington Village Hall,
Dunstan Road, Headington, OX3 9BY

For full details see
https://headington.quakermeeting.org/

***Forty-Three*** is available online at
https://oxfordquaker.com/newsletter/

and on the Oxford Quakers website,
https://oxfordquaker.com/

The views expressed in ***Forty-Three***
do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

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**Please send newsletter contributions by the 15th of the month, the submission deadline.**

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org or a paper copy can be left in the office pigeonhole of any editor.
For more information: tel. +44 (0)1865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org.