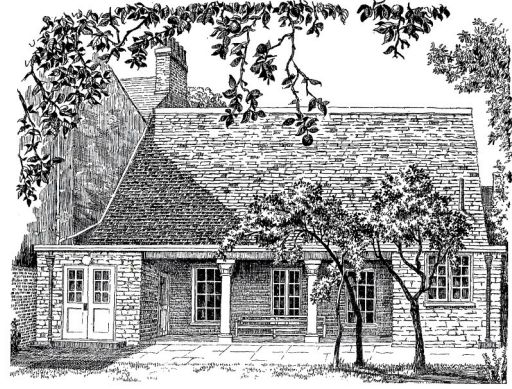


Forty-Three newsletter

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Oxford Friends Meeting

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A Statement of Unity

Ellen Bassani

In the summer of 2003, I put myself into a situation where total concentration was essential. In fact, my life depended on it.

A tall ship called Tenacious was the setting, climbing the main mast, the object. Bound for Lisbon through the Bay of Biscay, this stunning three-master welcomed crew members with a range of abilities. It was an opportunity for disabled and non-disabled enthusiasts to sail together.

Within minutes of boarding, while vaguely pointing upwards, I declared with my usual flair for drama that I would adore to climb the mast. Not a jot of an idea did I have about the reality of such a request: 139 feet of treacherous climbing. In the days that followed I was to learn! Rapid backtracking thereafter kept me very very silent.

Unfortunately, the boson remembered! Five days into the sail, he shouted into the heaving galley that he was ready to escort me up the mast. The dreamed of, drooled-over, breakfast fry-up instantly lost its appeal. There it sat, untouched. A tragedy, for Bob the chef's 'full English' was the envy of the sailing world. Low grease, crispy bacon,

melt-in-the-mouth eggs, mushrooms done in butter – untouched, left as is.

Only three others had climbed the mast thus far. They were non-disabled.

Before I could stop it my disloyal mouth was bleating, "Yes, great. I'll just go and get my safety harness!". "Finish your breakfast, there's no hurry", the boson called as he bolted up the galley steps two at a time. Finish my breakfast. He must be joking!

There, among the clatter of plates and the swirl of off-balanced bodies, why didn't I just say "No. I've changed my mind"? He would have shrugged and said "okay". Everyone would have understood my decision, especially those who did not dare to climb themselves. But no, brave adventurous El had to show off her mettle once again.

Very stark was the danger. Not just the product of a vivid imagination. Despite health and safety regulations, accidents do happen, and 139 feet is a long way to fall.

Terrified, with breathing shallow, I followed. One plodding step after another. What on earth was I trying to prove?

Continued next page ...

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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.



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Surely, to step outside my front door with such a small amount of sight is adventurous enough. Did I really need to climb those many feet upwards while the ship dipped and rolled? On Tenacious, avoiding ropes, steps, and carelessly placed limbs was hazard aplenty. Wasn't it just pride? How much braver or brighter did I have to be?

Question upon question tumbled through my rapidly numbing brain as I bumbled across the planked deck from which the mainsail lunged skywards.

And yet. And yet. Not just pride or competitiveness drove me below deck. The same little voice that took me up the Himalayas, white-water rafting, and alone to Japan was trying to nudge its way through the numbness. I learnt young that opportunities must be leapt at if any chance of independence was to be had. Frightened or not, I always reached out and grabbed with both hands. This time, like all those other times, there was a life-changing exercise to realise. All I had to do was listen. Precious insights from doing so had produced an

indomitable spirit of adventure in me, too deeply ingrained to lightly cast off.

Such a flaunted spirit of adventure deserted me pretty soundly once beside the harness hook. While the ship bowed and danced its way across the Bay of Biscay, my fingers tried to make sense of straps, bands, and clamps. I failed miserably to click interconnecting locks. All semblance of control gone, I bounced off walks, cupboards, and banks. Quite undignified. "You don't have to do this", a friend repeated as she anchored me to a bulkhead and with flying fingers took over the fastening of the harness.

Didn't have to do it! My agitation stopped. Voiced out loud into the space between us I finally could hear the truth. She was right. I didn't have to climb that wretched mast. I didn't have to climb anything other than the steps towards my lunch. Why not count the bunks until I found mine, lie down, turn my face to the wall and go to sleep. My friend could speak to the boson. I could finally relax.

Continued next page ...

My feet didn't move. My bum still glued itself to the bulkhead. Only my hands flicked into action. Blast. Once again, I couldn't make the harness unclick. What was that rush of feeling? Frustration, certainly, relief yes, but also something quite unexpected. Disappointment. It filled my body, the cabin, the whole ship. There, swaying gently with friend fussing, the inner voice was whispering. The demon bully I never ignored. I must not throw away this once-in-a-lifetime experience though my life might depend on it.

Too shocked, I had to find the nearest bunk to sit down. What was happening? Was I actually choosing to walk up those cabin steps, stride towards the mainmast where boson and crew members waited, and say "I'm ready!"?

Then a hitherto unrecognised reason for this adventure occurred to me as I sat there with the lower straps of the harness dangling over my knees, and the sound of slapping waves only feet from my head. One hundred years ago, my grandfather sailed from Australia to Southampton on a tall ship. One morning he went missing. His distraught parents who had just buried their baby daughter at sea found him, triumphant, in the crow's nest at the top of the mast! He was nine. If he could do it, then surely shouldn't I at least try?

Whatever the reasons, I appeared ten minutes later, harnessed, toileted, and ready. Feet from the waiting crew, I halted. Terror. Such terror! They dragged a box up beside the rigging. Necessary, because my legs wouldn't lift themselves onto the dipping rail.

Years before, I'd agreed to abseil down a hundred foot building. Calmly, I'd donned the helmet and safety kit and made my way towards the parapet, where I had to sit and then pivot my body around to start walking down the side of the building. On a practice wall I'd managed it. The current wall was five times higher. Whether I could see the ground, or the sheer drop of the other buildings or not, I sat immobilised. Could I make my bottom leave the security of that concrete surface? No way. No amount of coaxing and reassurance from the organisers would convince my primitive brain that it was a good idea to hurl myself into space. To give

way was equally against my nature. So, there I sat, frozen and humiliated. Only by the helpers lifting me up and physically turning me 180 degrees did I force my legs to move downwards. That same force held me glued to the main deck. How smooth the rail felt as I clung. Odd that memory.

This time the brain refused to go upwards. The will was there. My legs just wouldn't move. How to climb upon the rail without help? Impossible. Yet turn back? There we stood.

Someone made a decision. Not me. Heaved from behind. Again, undignified. My feet landed on the ship's rail. I grabbed at the soaring rigging, turned my back on the white-capped waves, found the first rung, and was off. Like a cat, the boson followed sleek and lithe. No pushing from behind for him.

The only rule of climbing rigging is to keep three points of the body – two hands one foot or two feet one hand – on the ladder at the same time. There was little fear of that. I clung like a mollusc.

Slowly, slowly, up I went. Too many thoughts of catastrophe crashed in on me. What if I missed my step and my motherless children were left alone to blame me for my irresponsibility?

Here it came. The climb's first life-lesson. If dangerous mistakes were to be avoided, these whirling thoughts had to stop immediately.

Never good at stilling my skittish mind, I faltered. What, total control of my thoughts? Unlikely, but without this I could not take another step, and to go back assaulted my very sense of who I was.

With supreme effort, I concentrated on the feel of hands wrapped around metal and feet on solid wood. Any other sensation was erased, sat on, eliminated.

It worked. Danger really does focus the mind. And it worked until nearing the first platform, forty feet above deck. Was it an advantage not to see the looming manhole? This narrow opening designed for snake-hipped boys posed a problem for my womanly form. The harness clips had not been used until this point. My choice. Somehow, having to

manoeuvre one-handed a two-part locking device towards a solid piece of rigging, without being able to see, felt more dangerous than climbing unsecured. To keep to the rule of three points seemed the best bet.

However, approaching the manhole was the time to clip on. To find a way through I needed to reach up and back, leaving me almost parallel with the deck. Beyond terrifying!

One might ask what was the boson doing all this time? He was offering possible hand and feet holds to take me into the hole and up over the rail onto the first platform. Shaking myself, I listened. But not too much. This adventure was mine.

When I stood with shaking legs and deep pride on the solid platform, great cheers soared up from below. Gratifying, unexpected, and yes, disconcerting. I had an audience. How could I turn back now?

With a theatrical bow, I was up over the railings and into the next forty-foot climb towards the second platform. The manhole was even narrower, but with instruction from the ever-patient boson I was through and up. Again the cheer, again the bow, less flamboyant. No real feelings, only adrenaline. Eighty feet up, the ship's roll was more pronounced. The sounds from below, so very far away.

My sight was so poor I didn't see what was to follow. Now used to and engaged by the feel of the rigging, I believed it went right to the top. The boson led me to a simple ladder and told me I was now on my own.

Ladder! Where were the yards of wood and metal lolling either side of me? Only wind, gusty wind, flanked this narrow wooden upright. I felt it arc with the ship's roll. The pennant clicked at the top, a long way up. Fifty-nine feet up in fact. This is where the terror struck me full in the face.

Since the decision to focus, I'd slowly begun to enjoy the challenge of finding the right foot and hand hold, with the challenge of hauling my body through, across, and up. A ladder going heavenwards without the reassurance of the

boson's voice behind me seemed too much. He must have seen my panic again, and gently reminded me that eighty feet was still very impressive.

Even the cheers from below bounced off me. I could neither go up nor down. It was the fear of not trying that got me over the last rail and up.

First big shock. The rungs of the ladder were rope! Unstable. Until now my feet had rested on something solid. To have them wobble with my trembling was very disconcerting. At least the uprights were rigid. I clung, fought hard to regain my nerve, and started to climb. The next forty feet passed without noticing much of significance.

Then came the second shock. The rungs narrowed as I went higher. So narrow that one had to place one foot over the other, drag the bottom foot up and over and place it on the next rung up.

Third shock. The ship's roll became more pronounced the higher I went, and the wind was relentless, deafening.

Then something odd happened. Something that hadn't happened in my adult life. I said ENOUGH! One of my secret little pockets of pride had been that I didn't give up a task once it was started. But this was too much. I could not use a ladder where one foot had to rest on the other. Despite my grandfather, the fear of disappointment, and the sense of achievement — nothing was as important as my safety.

I harnessed myself with both safety clips and just clung, 133 feet above the deck, with only six feet to go. Yet I stayed where I was, exhausted and empty. To descend was unthinkable.

Then came a gentle tap on my arm. Had an angel materialised? It was Chris, the profoundly deaf, sixteen year old lad who had seen my distress and climbed the starboard rigging to give me support.

The most powerful picture of the trip must surely be a blind woman and a deaf boy holding hands across the mainmast: *a statement of unity*.

Monthly Appeal - December 2021 Quaker Children's Collection: Asylum Welcome

Virginia Allport

This year the children and families from Oxford Meeting have decided to support the charity Asylum Welcome as their special collection in December. They were inspired by watching the visit to Oxford of Little Amal, the striking three-and-a-half metre puppet who has come all the way from Turkey raising awareness of the problems faced by migrant families. She has now arrived in Glasgow.



Little Amal
Wikimedia Commons License

This is part of a letter from Mark Goldring, the director of Asylum Welcome:

Dear Friend,

The Afghan crisis has been at the forefront of many people's minds over these last few months. Several hundred refugees, evacuated from Afghanistan in the emergency airlift, are now

being housed in hotels around Oxfordshire whilst they await longer-term housing. Asylum Welcome is playing a key role in supporting the new arrivals and coordinating resettlement efforts.

The new arrivals, including many children and families, have lived through unimaginable stress and trauma. Asylum Welcome is working closely with the County Council to help the families settle, to have access to clothing and other needs, and mobile phones and connectivity to stay in touch with their homes and communities, both abroad and here. We have helped them to register with services and to access healthcare, and for all family members to learn English and prepare for life in the UK. We must ensure that women are not left out and that their voices are heard. We know what a difference this work is making in helping people to feel welcome.

In September, dozens of the children started school around Oxfordshire. The first day of school is exciting and nerve-wracking for any child. Imagine how it feels for the new arrivals. The children – boys and girls, of primary and secondary – returned excited and positive after their first day at school, raring to go the next day.

The rest of life is less straightforward. Life in the hotels is transitory, as the new arrivals await permanent resettlement. Right now, nowhere near enough housing has been secured. They live with uncertainty about life back home and life here, and remain unable to fully begin a new life.

— Mark Goldring, director.

Contributions:

Online payments:
Asylum Welcome,
Account no. 65026773,
Sort code 08-92-50

Cheques, and CAF cheques:
Asylum Welcome,
Unit 7, Newtec Place,
Magdalen Road,
Oxford, OX4 1RE
Tel: 01865 722082

Death Sonnets

A Six-Sonnet Sequence

Brigid Schroer

1

I wonder what it would be like if I
knew that we weren't going to die.
I could be steady, enduring as a stone,
not the flowed-through thing I am,
moving briefly in and gone.
And you and I would face each other,
slow to change, no hurry with no end.
Having all time to fill or leave unused,
would we become confused
or passionless and wise, no longer
needing, needing, wanting, needing?
And how would it alter
what we think we are together?
I'd be afraid to live with my mistake for ever.

2

Death will come. You and I both know
that we move briefly, swiftly through
before we're gone. No more.
No further chance to change or grow.
Having so small a time, what must we do
to make the most of all that's now?
I've seen so little of the world. We'll find
where's most important to explore,
then come back bronzed and reminisce,
walk arm-in-arm and laugh together,
drink good wine and make new music. Dare
to deepen, live at last, to risk
and so to love each other more
and — if we can — become more sure.

3

Death will come, and I'm afraid. Only bravado
talks of using well what's left, and though
I try to puzzle through the meaning
of so short a span, it can never be enough.
I am a mouth, all of me a mouth
that shouts defiance, terror. I'm clinging
to life. I want to go on and on. I know,
but can't. I cower, hunker down.
I kick and hurl myself against the fact, trying
for a way to grasp it. I feel a caving,
shrinking in my chest. It makes no sense.
I can change nothing. I find no recompense —
except to change myself, but that I can't maintain.
And what of lives cut shorter, and in pain?

4

All my life I've been afraid of death,
not accepting, not understanding.
Nothing lasts, not health, not fortune. Worth
and meaning seemed to shrivel.
But now I'm closer with less life to live
I find to be arched round by death
frees me from fuss about the trivial
annoyances, and I am joyful.
We come unknowing, our time is brief,
and then we go. This wave we surf
collapses on the shore in tiny bubbles,
melting into sand and pebbles.
If we live full, free, together, what difference
which beach we break on into silence?

5

Who am I fooling? This thing, death,
is blackout, total goneness. Final.
A living creature shouldn't know,
or feel it has a separate self. Earth
to earth, back to my emergence, my original.
I'd be better off not conscious I must go.
Men, women, children, die in earthquake,
flood or fire, are killed in war,
starve, trudge in broken lines, and sink
before they've had a chance to make
a life. And creatures everywhere are
put to death. I stand here on the brink
like all those others gone and going, in dread,
ankles caressed by the shoals of the dead.

6

When I walk in the fields I think how
I walk in my origins, my face their face,
my life theirs. They have spread under weather,
carried kingcups in floods from the river —
gleamed round by blackthorn, no plough
since farmed in strips, a Saxon trace.
This river, every tree and grazing cow
I pass, the streets and houses, all in place
and time, are parts of me. They share my source.
Before I was formed, before the land had shape,
we were. We cast no shadow, took no space,
companions in the absence of a preset now
with everything that was and is. We've come
together here. And so I see myself in them.

Editor's note: An Autumn Retreat Day entitled 'Where the Divine and Human Meet?' was held on Saturday 30 October at 43 St Giles. The four organisers of the event – Deb Arrowsmith, Ellen Bassani, Anthea Richards, and Carol Saker – offer their personal responses to the day:

Making Spiritual Compost

Deb Arrowsmith

There's a lovely Quaker phrase used when we are about to contemplate and discern something: "the matter is before you Friends". Well, here we are sitting around a pile of compost – and this dark matter before us is, for me, the ultimate in where the human and divine meet.

This is after all literally where we will end up – in earth or as ash – when we die. Is this where we 'meet our maker'? I think so, and I want to suggest why and what our 'maker' may be up to.

In meeting for worship, we usually gather round a bunch of flowers. Here we have taken it to the nth degree: the flowers are gone, 'gone to compost everyone'. When will we ever learn? When will we ever learn?

First, let's learn a bit about making compost. This is my compost – how do I make it? First, by chopping up everything very small. That creates greater surface area for bacteria to enter and the detritivores to do their stuff.

That's not a rock band, but it could be. Detritivores are bugs and beetles, worms, and insects taking centre stage to feast away on the decay all around them, breaking it down. Then, by adding warmth, water, air, and patient waiting it turns into ... well ... the richest, most life-giving, nourishing, sustaining product you could imagine.

Now that's what we do in meeting: patient waiting. I wonder if what we are doing in meeting is making our own collective spiritual compost – letting everything distill, die down, break up, fall apart? We provide water, warmth, and waiting. And we see

what emerges – collectively, being led by the spirit and the insights of others, we experience things shifting. We have occasionally even felt this in a business meeting! Arriving with fixed positions and being gradually moved to change. This moving fertile soil is where new shoots will emerge. In meeting we need to get down deep into the richness of what grounds us and gives us our being. To sweep away all the surface material: our political opinions, personal anxieties, all the thinking we did on the way to meeting or the rehearsed ministry that sounded so right to us at 3am.

I'm not sure it's easy for any of us at any age to become compost – to fall apart. Many people find letting go, giving up, laying things down hard. We cling on so hard to life, often only realising how precious it is when under threat. A grim diagnosis can send us into panic or despair, but we knew we were going to die, didn't we? It's hard to imagine being dead. Not being at all.

Then there are all our un-compostable bits to deal with: those parts of our character or practice that we simply can't seem to change – the equivalent of the plastic plant labels you find in all compost. They simply won't go away. What are yours? Your most stubborn bits? Impatience, prejudice, fixed opinions? They won't grow new shoots, however hard you try. It's not where the energy comes from. It's not where it is at all.



Photo by SL Granum

It's important to know that you haven't made this compost; you haven't really done a thing! We can't *make* a seed sprout, a leaf grow, a bud form, a flower blossom, a fruit ripen. All we do is let it happen. Every good gardener knows all we do is tend to the material. So the instruction to 'come with heart and mind prepared' is tending to our material – making it available, allowing the spirit to move, change, and alter us, and giving us growth.

And it's this black gold of compost that lights the fire of each seed, protects, and nourishes each new shoot, gives it a start in life. Look. Can you see

yourself there? Can you see where I end and you begin? No! It's all become one.

Amazing all this death and decay – the rubbish, the chuckings out, prunings, waste paper, waste food, grass cuttings – all mingling, merging, and becoming one rocket fuel for new life. By the way, prunings are technically called 'uprisings'. I like it!

Now, you could reflect on what I'm saying. Read it, insert as many biblical references as you wish to illustrate this, as many verses from the Koran, as many Buddhist chants. There are many ways of making compost but only one God – if, as I believe now, God IS the energy, the spirit, the spark behind, beneath, beyond all things.

You could load this down with theology, doctrine, with ritual practice – but all you really need to do is tend to letting go. Give yourself air, warmth, and time. In our simple way you could look at the compost, sit with it, appreciate the beauty of all life in it (as Anthea has encouraged us to do), and say – or better still feel, feel in your bones, in your flesh – that this is where it IS. God IS. (Remember 'I AM'?) And here IS where *someone* sets a seed – maybe the seed is already there patiently waiting for the moment – that new life begins.

Now we have to grasp that one day we will become a waste product. We will die. And decay. Not necessarily in that order. But die we must. It's hard to imagine giving up, letting go. So for me this IS the divine inspiration. In our death some energy or force or whatever you call God can take everything that we have given up, thrown away, wasted – everything that has broken apart – and make of it new life. The Divine picks up all our brokenness and weaves it into some new life.

Where the human and divine meet IS then where we let go, give way, some say surrender. Allowing others, equally inspired, to join us. Allow those detritivores to do their thing. One of the few things I know is that where we work together for the good of all, God IS.



Photo by SL Granum

Quaker Autumn Retreat October 2021

Ellen Bassani

The idea for our retreat arose out of a desire to refocus on Quaker roots, the seeking of the Light within a gathered contemplative stillness. We event organisers (Deb Arrowsmith, Ellen Bassani, Anthea Richards, and Carol Saker) had discerned that this aspect of Quakerism risks becoming secondary, especially in times of pressing need for social action.

My blindness has allowed me to catch glimpses of the deep joy in surrendering to the promptings of the spirit, and I have arrived there through learning to place my complete trust into the hands of God and the kindness of strangers. Where I have felt hesitation in trusting, I've come to appreciate that I am bridled by my fear and a false belief in total personal independence.

Accordingly, I led a retreat exercise in which sighted participants were first blindfolded and then paired with sighted guides upon whom the blindfolded would need to depend totally as they allowed themselves to be led out unsighted along a busy street and also through the confines of 43 St Giles. My idea was that these brave participants would be inspired to glimpse the blocks impeding their own pathways to trust and surrender.

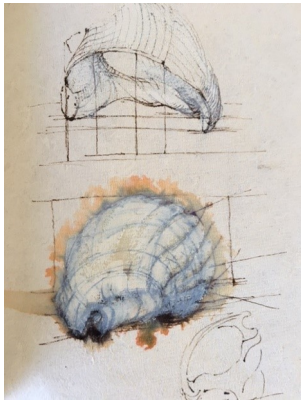


Photo by Juliet Henderson

Retreat Sketches

Anthea Richards

I believe the silent mind is the Meeting Point of the Human and Divine. I chose shells from my life-time collection for Friends to select one to look at, dropping all words in the mind — until you are in the present, just seeing the form.



Drawings by Anthea Richards

Quaker Legacy at the Autumn Retreat

Carol Saker

Our event team started to plan the Retreat day, and the Quaker legacy element fell to me. I felt we should ground our day in tracing our roots and their evolution through the centuries by way of the wise sayings and writings of our forebears, from our 17th century beginnings to the present.

I went back to one of the earliest Swarthmore lectures, *Spiritual Guidance in Quaker Experience* written by William Charles Braithwaite in 1909. This was a time of renaissance within Quakerism, inspired by John Wilhelm Rowntree. The Swarthmore lectures were part of this, as were the inauguration of Woodbrooke college and other ventures. All had the purpose of bringing Quakerism into the 20th century and reinvigorating it for the youth and the younger generation.

I was struck by a reference to Edward Grubb within the 1909 lecture. Grubb was a British Quaker, a prolific religious author of the early 20th century, a social reformer, and an absolute pacifist. He particularly impressed Braithwaite with his suggestion that the Light Within is just as much a human faculty as is reason. Grubb had realised that the young were at a loss because of the breakdown of outward authority, and he wanted to encourage young people to trust more fully in the inward authority. His *Authority and the Light Within* had

just been published in 1908. Braithwaite referred to Grubb's distinction between outward authority (practices, rules, laws) and inward authority (morality, conscience, spirituality). Grubb believed inward authority came from God and becomes our guide through life: "*in the depth of every person the divine and the human meet*".

Now we had the title for our Retreat! The remaining work on this element of the day was to carefully select from the first two generations of early Quakers' wisdoms, add 18th century American reformer John Woolman, and then marry the Quaker Renaissance with the post-WWI Quaker thinkers such as Rufus Jones and Kenneth Boulding. Next we would bring in some of our 21st century doubts by drawing on Ben Pink Dandelion's *The Quakers* (2008) and his 2014 Swarthmore Lecture *Open for Transformation*. And finally, we all agreed to end with a final contemporary quotation from Thomas Penny's thought-provoking 2021 Swarthmore lecture *Kinder Ground: Creating Space for Truth*, with its absolutely up to date focus on truth.

These fifteen or so extracts were displayed on the walls of the Meeting House and remained there the next day for Sunday worship, so hopefully they have reached a wider audience than the Retreat participants. Though I couldn't be present at the end of the Retreat because of ill health, I was very much there in spirit 'from a deep place in the heart'.

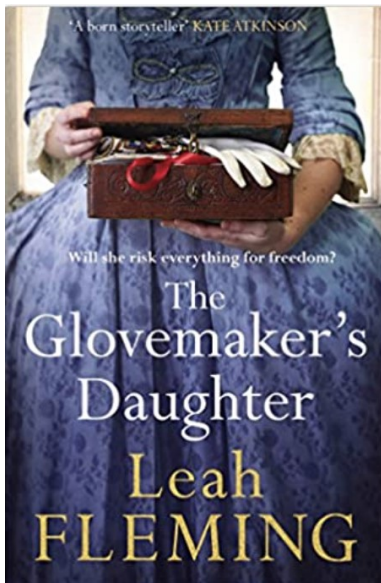
Review of Leah Fleming's *The Glovemaker's Daughter*

Jean Moir

Note from Jean's husband Richard Abernethy: *Jean Moir has written this short review for Forty-Three. Jean is currently doing well at her care home and doing a lot of reading and gentle exercise. She was very ill for much of last year. After making a good recovery in the early months of this year, she fractured her left hip, requiring a hip replacement operation, which took place in September. (Her right hip was replaced last year.) She joins in silent worship in her room every Sunday morning. This is the first piece she has written for publication since her illness. We thank Friends for holding us in the Light.*

*Regards,
Richard.*

This is the fascinating and exciting story of a rebellious young 17th century Friend, Rejoice (Joy)



Moorside. She speaks out against the cruel treatment of Friends by the constable and vicar of her Yorkshire village. Through various adventures she makes her way to Leeds, where she and another Friend, Ellinor, plan to go to America on a travelling ministry.

However, she finds that some of the Friends she meets do not share her openness to new ideas, or her willingness to make friends with the Native Americans. They also disapprove of her attraction to a militia captain. She recognises the 'divine light' in people who are not Friends. Finally, she leaves Quakers and marries her captain.

The novel shows the cruel restrictions of the established church, but also the more well-intentioned restrictiveness of early Friends, as they struggled to uphold the testimonies.

Peace at a Price?

Richard Seebohm

23/11/21

Under the auspices of the Oxford Changing Character of War Centre, I went to a lecture by a defence insider.

The UK military are climate aware. They know that climate change will destabilise the world and make local conflicts more likely. And they know that their role is to destroy things. They themselves have a target to be carbon neutral by 2050. The RAF want to do it by 2040. How? Our speaker thinks this not good enough. But I did not get the feeling that carbon emission audits were a fact of life. One statement that struck me was that the UK defence industry is no longer seen as a field of competing suppliers but as an asset to the UK armed services.

Informally, I asked whether armed drones could go the way of land mines and get banned. I said I was terrified of the scope for insurgents to deploy them on powers that be, or on benign powers that might one day be. I was told that they were too useful because of their 'accuracy'. Mines had already been thought counter-productive.

I asked about nuclear warheads – what was the point of holding more than was needed to destroy life on earth? The savings from holding fewer would not be massive. The UK had cut delivery capability to a cost-saving minimum. France had more warheads than the UK. Israel had just 20, knowing where they might deploy them. Apparently the USA claimed to target nuclear strikes to within a prescribed area limit. The Russians were not so capable.

The North Pole is becoming an ocean, opening new trade and naval options. But the focus of geopolitical attention is now the Pacific and not the Atlantic side of the world. The UK military should be seeing the Europeans as more reliable partners than the US. The legacy tangle of the Middle East – and Afghanistan – seemed to me out of sight and out of mind (reminding me of the Chinese translation of this as 'invisible idiot').

The UK services think they are up to speed in cyber space and AI. But the Chinese hypersonic ballistic missile may be a 'sputnik moment'.

White Poppy Reflections

Ali Smith

“Have you seen that gorgeous poppy by the front door?” I said.

“That’s not a poppy,” she said.

“Why is it not?” I said.

“Because it’s not red!”



Photo from Wikipedia, under the Creative Commons license.

Hooray! As my then-3-year-old grand-daughter did five years ago, the Beeb have become alive to poppies that are not red. White poppies will be ‘allowed’ on screen in future.

<https://www.ppu.org.uk/news/bbc-allow-presenters-wear-white-poppies-air>

Poppies on screen are heavy with symbolism and meaning. Does this decision mean that white poppies are to be accepted for what they represent and remember – ALL who have been killed in any war or conflict, both civilian and soldier? No longer to be seen as disrespectful or even treasonable?

Is this a culture change moment?

I have three more joyful white poppy stories from this year:

Wednesday dancing 10/11/21

A friend telling me about her 10-year-old daughter who had arrived home from school with a red poppy, and then made her own white poppy which she was going to wear to school the next day.

Remembrance Sunday 14/11/21

While the crowds at Remembrance Sunday were drifting away, a small knot of us remaining from the vigil were approached by someone who asked us if we had seen the teenage Cadet taking part who was wearing a white poppy with her red.

Thursday gardening 18/11/21

I asked a young woman who was taking a picture of the white poppy on the front of the meeting house whether she would like to buy one. A small one.

She had been impressed with the Quaker white poppy wreath which she had seen on the war memorial and wanted some pictures for the blog she writes. She left with her pictures and a small white poppy.

Small sparks to light my week, or the signs of a changing world?



Photo by SL Granum

Reflections on Retirement

Linet Arthur

Retirement is probably different for everyone, but there are inevitably some common features to the shift from a relatively predictable work pattern to a lengthy expanse of unstructured time. As I contemplated retirement beforehand, I felt excited by the prospect – an unending holiday with money coming in. What could be better? I delighted in the thought of finishing the aspects of work that I did not enjoy – marking and meetings – while anticipating that I would miss my colleagues and students.

Retiring has connotations of withdrawing – from work, of course, but also in a more general sense, from company and society. I hope my retirement will be the opposite: a chance to engage in learning, campaigning, and creativity. At the same time, I'm aware of the dangers of 'action for action's sake', neglecting the opportunity for restoring spiritual strength. Caroline Graveson (1937 – in an old edition of *Christian Faith and Practice*) said that '*True leisureliness is a beautiful thing and may not lightly be given away ... People do not pour their joys or sorrows into the care of those with an eye on the clock*'.

So I need a balance in my newly-retired life and at the moment busy-ness is outweighing leisureliness. Alongside the long-term project of clearing my office of 25 years of detritus while also attending classes in portrait-drawing, sculpture, and French – in the last couple of weeks I have met a cousin and husband who were visiting Oxford for the day, helped another cousin take her narrowboat to Reading, and collected two bantam pullets from Stadhampton to take to my mother. I have just agreed to join Oxford Friends Action on Poverty (OxFAP), something for which I would not have had time while working, and I am still on Nominations Committee.

My ongoing challenge will be to find that 'still small voice of peace', to allow time in the midst of plentiful tasks for spiritual refreshment and growth. I have perhaps been unconsciously avoiding the leisureliness that Caroline Graveson described. Perhaps a gentler pace and fewer structured activities will help, '*for peace comes dropping slow*' (WB Yeats, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*).

Young Adult Friends

Tas Cooper

Young Adult Friends are going to officially restart the tradition of the first Monday evening of every month being an all-ages-welcome meeting!

We'll meet from 19:00 to 21:00 to enjoy half an hour (roughly, as led) of worship and a supper of baked potato, cheese, beans, some sort of dessert provided by YAFs, and anything else you would like to bring.

So, Monday 6 December 19:00-21:00 come along however young or old you feel!



COVID has Thrown us into a Liminal Space

Trio Watson

“COVID has thrown us into a liminal space,” I read in a music review, “and that is why I have called my new album 'Liminality'.” I was fascinated to read this, because although I didn’t know what the word ‘liminal’ meant, somehow this *cri de coeur* spoke to me. I googled it.

For me it is certainly true that with regard to my Quaker practice I am in a liminal space: the known quantity has gone, really, and now here is a new



silent space with COVID in it. Feeling my way into it, trying to discern, or recognise, or invent distinct shapes in this cloudy interim environment ... is very weird. I wondered if I’d somehow lost God. My faith had gone into a rather threadbare patch where secular ideas, or ideas from other practices, become more inspiring than the old ones. I decided it was normal for a faith journey.

I found reassurance in the silver necklace that I’d bought as a ‘capture’ of the time I first became a member of the Society of Friends. Comfort also came in the form of vegan ice cream, and the reassurance of friends (big and small F) whose practices didn’t seem to have got lost in the same

way. COVID has presented a challenge to the status quo, to be sure. Some say this is how God works, it might even be Him at His best. I started a spiritual journal.

If I seem to write a lot about trips to the pub, I’d like to qualify such trips by saying they are rather unusual for me. If I’m not visiting a church, holy outreach is often helped by the ministrations of a publican and a packet of salted nuts. Our intimate conversation is protected by chatter and clatter and a recording by Dua Lipa. We stop the daily flow to make space for a different experience, for each other. I’m happy to pray to a God who makes this stuff possible. (Coffee is also good.)

Stopping, for the sake of an important spiritual conversation, is obviously something that Quakers are good at. I enjoy the tiddlyfaff of my working day at the shop, and chats with customers who are Christmas shopping and are thinking aloud on consumer ethics, gifting, and love. Sometimes, just as I am replacing the label roll on our purple pricing gun, someone will start an observation of family life, traditions, foibles and all. To encourage it, I put down the gun. Similarly, one day when we had closed up but still had other admin and things to do on the premises, my colleague and I made tea, and she gave me a healing for my sore shoulder. Praying aloud, and laying on hands, is not a Quaker

tradition, but we have space for it in our credo as an appreciation of the ‘diverse liveries’ of practice. My shoulder is still sore, but she’s feeling much better! And we managed to improve the protective cardboard casing around the shop Wi-Fi. And in that making of space, we confirmed the value of our inadequate experience, the reality of frailty, and the strength of our gentleness. Working days since have been very smooth, even in the busiest times.

I miss the people and places at 43 St Giles. It seems that this hiatus in my Quaker practice is the right thing to be doing, and the life of the Meeting still informs my days. I will be back at some point! Meantime I send lots of love xx Trio

Quaker Videos in this Month's *Forty-Three*

In the first video, Gretchen Castle describes the world-wide distribution of Quakers. In the second, Tom Hoopes confronts his white privilege. In the third video, Chris Stern reflects on his personal spiritual journey through the study of George Fox's Journal.



Gretchen Castle
General Secretary
Friends World Committee
for Consultation

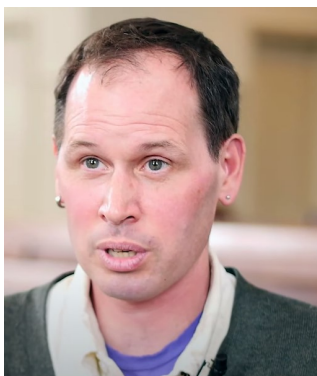
[How Many Quakers Are There in the World? \(And Where Are They?\)](#)

FWCC publishes a map of Quakers worldwide. So how many Quakers are there in the world? The answers might surprise you.

Quaker Speak

5 Minutes

https://youtu.be/zn_YqoHOL4M



Tom Hoopes
Valley Friends Meeting
Wayne, PA

[White Quakers Confronting White Privilege](#)

As a Quaker in the early 21st century I am acutely aware that I have inherited and am an active participant in a tradition that has benefitted from centuries of exploitation and domination. That is not something that we usually advertise and talk about openly, but I think that we need to.

Quaker Speak

8 Minutes

<https://youtu.be/QdryofASgjM>



Chris Stern
Middletown Friends Meeting
Lima, PA

[Understanding Quaker Faith Through the Journal of George Fox](#)

I thought that to be a good Quaker I had to be A, B, C, D, and if I couldn't do those things maybe I wasn't a good Quaker.

Quaker Speak

5 Minutes

<https://youtu.be/px03H3N7qF4>



43 St Giles Community Noticeboard online!



Events December

25th day, 12th month! There will be a Christmas Day Meeting for Worship on 25 December from 10:45 for about 45 minutes. This will be followed by a bring and share lunch. Contact anyone from the Pastoral Care Group or Chris White if you can be there and for details of how to help.

Kindness Cafe

Oxford Quaker Meeting House & Garden

Serving tea, coffee, cakes and kindness —
All proceeds to Quaker work.

Sunday 5 December 10:00-12:00
tea/coffee/soup bread and treats



Come and help polish our meeting House benches in meditative silence.

Nourishing and cherishing the silence.

Thursday 2 December and
Thursday 9 December
10:00-12:30

The Meeting House Office will be closed from 17:00 Wednesday 22 December to Tuesday 4 January. Worship times continue as normal. Please be aware that our two apprentices Lorren and Jarell will be covering all shifts from 10 December to 10 January while Jacqui and Deb are on leave. Please help out where you can.

Smart scanning! You can pick up a copy of *Forty-Three* Newsletter in 43 St Giles. We print a limited number of copies, but as it's getting bigger and better each month a smarter way, if you have a smart phone, is to scan the QR code on the stand in the lobby. Try this out : **How to scan** Open the camera app on your phone. Point the camera towards the image. Then you'll be taken to the *Forty-Three* Newsletter.



Forty-Three Newsletter



riends!
Oxford Quakers

follow us on facebook and instagram
[@themeetinghouseoxford](#)



ooh!

CALENDAR for DECEMBER 2021

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many 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

We need to guard against under-valuing the material expressions of spiritual things. It is easy to make a form of our very rejection of forms. And in particular, we need to ask ourselves whether we are endeavouring to make all the daily happenings and doings of life which we call 'secular' minister to the spiritual. It is a bold and colossal claim that we put forward – that the whole of life is sacramental, that there are innumerable 'means of grace' by which God is revealed and communicated – through nature and through human fellowship and through a thousand things that may become the 'outward and visible sign' of 'an inward and spiritual grace'.

—A Barratt Brown
1932

OXFORD MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Meetings for worship are via Zoom and/or in person.

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 07:30-08:00 (in person only)

Wednesday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (Zoom only)
Meeting for Worship 11:30-12:15 (in person & Zoom)

Friday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (Zoom only)



Photo by SL Granum

Forty-Three is available online,
<https://brooksidepress.org/quaker/>
and on the Oxford Quakers website,
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.

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/>

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

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