



August 2021

# Scottish Friend



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Quakers at Work



Welcome Friends to the August 2021 edition of the Scottish Friend. As lockdown eases we are still on Zoom. However, good news, some Friends are gathering together and meeting face-to-face! Inverness LM met at a community centre in Inverness. 13 turned up! Comments and suggestions would be welcomed. When sending in contributions, please note your LM.

In Friendship, Sila

Editor, Scottish Friend: Sila Collins-Walden, Inverness LM  
Editor's Gofer, Technical Advisor, and Person to Blame if Anything Goes Wrong:  
Brian Walden

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Please send articles as an **editable attachment** to [silartist100@gmail.com](mailto:silartist100@gmail.com) or typed or hand-written to 27 Creag Dhubh Terrace, Inverness IV3 8QG to arrive five weeks before GM, ie, by **16 October 2021**. If you submit **images**, please ensure that they are about 1Mb in size. Any captions provided with your images should be short!

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**Calling for General Meeting for Scotland  
Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all! I hope you are well and that you are enjoying the summer sunshine.



*Elizabeth*

As I write this letter I am on a break between sessions at Yearly Meeting Gathering, which is being held this year by Zoom. Over 500 Friends attended the business session, which has just finished. It went well. We are getting used to worshipping and discerning together online and we are using the available online tools with skill. We do miss our face to face contacts but we are reminded that the Zoom gathering is accessible to many more people – well over 2000 Friends registered to attend all or part of it.

In Scotland, our General Meeting continues to be held by Zoom and it is for all of us to make the best use we can of these online meetings. **Our next General Meeting will be on 11th September. We will start with worship at 10.15 am, break for lunch from 12.15 pm to 1.15 pm, and our afternoon session will finish about 2.30 pm. I will send out details of how to join nearer the time.**

**This is an opportunity to meet virtually with Friends from across Scotland. We worship together and in a spirit of worship we attend to our church affairs, and matters concerning the spiritual life and witness of Quakers in Scotland. Please do come! All are welcome.**

So, what will we be doing at GM in September? As the time for COP26 approaches, we will be hearing how Quakers in Scotland are preparing for it and what opportunities there will be for you to engage with events. Much of GM witness on climate justice is done through our link with Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and we will learn more about this. How much do you know about what our Parliamentary Engagement Officer does on our behalf? Andrew Tomlinson will tell us about his Quaker advocacy work and its effect. The working group we set up to identify options for change in the way we work which would benefit Quakers in Scotland is up and running and the convenor, Lesley Richards, will give an interim report on what the group is doing and what it intends to do.



*Michael*

Papers and the draft agenda will be circulated about a week prior to GM. if you do not receive them, please ask Sue Proudlove [scotfriends@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriends@gmail.com) for a copy. If you have any questions, please contact me, your clerk, by email [essallen@msn.com](mailto:essallen@msn.com) or telephone 01620 894834.

Elizabeth Allen

**Welcome to Michael Hutchinson, our new GM assistant clerk.**

**General Meeting for Scotland  
12 June 2021.  
Piers Voysey, Forres. NSAM**

Once again we are meeting online, in two sessions: 10.15am-12pm and 1pm-2.30pm. How nice it is to engage with Friends without leaving home. How sad not to see them in person, as so much communication is lost and a sense of togetherness is missing. This time I feel as though there is a bit of me is not entirely present in the Meeting as I am in my home environment, surrounded by familiar distractions. Meeting online reduces the risk of transferring infections, reduces the carbon footprint of travel and enables remote Friends to participate, but I have to work harder to feel really connected to Friends in the Meeting.

Connection to the business matters is helped by able clerking (thank you Elizabeth Allen) and clear and interesting presentations from others. So many thanks to the team for making it work for me.

Significant business has included receiving the annual report and accounts, which Nigel Dower presented with just the right amount of detail to help us understand progress through 2020 and the impact of the pandemic on spending. The annual report is also a useful reminder of how GM serves to bring the Scottish Area Meetings together for common purpose on concerns at a national level.

It is good to hear that GM is in a strong enough financial position, although drawing down on our reserves slightly when accrued expenditure is taken into account. Approximately £5000 is spent on being part of ecumenical, climate action and Quaker groups to ensure that our voice is heard where we feel it matters. This is in addition to the work of the Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer.

Nominations have brought forward most of the names who will be part of a 9-month project to compile options for a new Quaker structure in Scotland and options on ways to improve the efficiency of administration that will free up time to enhance our sense of community and feed our spiritual development.

This has been our new Local Development Worker, Zoe Prosser's first General Meeting and it's good to welcome her, to Scotland and GM, and hear more about her plans to get to know and work with us. In explaining her role she expects to work as a connector (linking us to advice and resources), as a facilitator, to help us re-view how we operate and to be generally encouraging and reassuring while listening to our concerns. Zoe has a warm and engaging personality and I , for one, look forward to working with her.

With COP26 in Glasgow approaching, Quakers are putting in a lot of time to engage with it in a constructive way. Joyce Taylor gave an update on the work of the PEO, which is focussing on climate change and peace issues. Among other things Andrew Tomlinson (PEO) is working with others to respond to a planning application for an MOD range near to the Buddhist centre at Samye Ling and to bring more awareness on Scotland's role in the arms industry.

Efforts are ongoing to make the PEO post a permanent position, so BYM, GM and the Scottish AM's are working to ensure they can commit to the required funding. Quakers across Scotland value the political engagement; it helps us speak beyond our size and emphasises our spiritual and secular engagement in society.

In hearing the reports from Friends engaged with the Enquirers Day, Scottish Churches Housing Action, Faith in Community Scotland, the Interfaith Group on Domestic Abuse, Acts Group on Human Trafficking, and Together Scotland got me thinking about the power of work delivered by a diversity of volunteers. Listen-

ing to their reports is not just interesting, it is how we connect with what they do and support them with our attention. We are then better able to engage when strategic decisions are required. In considering our ongoing involvement with one organisation, one Friend commented on having checked back over their accounts submitted to Companies House or available on their website; now this is coming to Meeting with mind prepared! Not all of us find time to give to this level of research, but it is so helpful to our discernment if someone does!

On reflection this GM had few decisions but a lot of listening and gentle up-holding and acknowledging our capacity to influence our society. ■



Plasticine MfW by NSAM children.

**BDRC update for SESAME Feb 2021 following January committee meeting.**

**Mary Woodward Portobello & Musselburgh.**

**W**hat a difference a year makes! Last year, we held our January committee meeting at Friends House: as we looked forward to meeting again at Warwick University in the April, we had no idea that our world was about to be turned upside down. One year on, your committee held its first meeting of 2021 by zoom at the end of January.

Several Friends have asked to be released from the committee over this past year, and Yearly Meeting Nominations were asked to bring new names to Meeting for Sufferings for them to appoint. In January we welcomed two new members to the committee – Alastair Reid of West Scotland AM and Finola O’Sullivan of Cambridgeshire AM. Since we were prevented from our usual ‘getting to know you’ chats outside business sessions, we took particular care to spend time all together, and in small groups, sharing our thoughts and experiences. I appreciated the time taken in our opening session to share our names, where we lived, and one place particularly dear to our hearts, whether it was somewhere we could visit now or somewhere we yearned to be once restrictions were lifted. A surprising number of Friends spoke longingly of the Outer Hebrides...

We have learned by experience that while using zoom we need to change our usual working pattern, and have shorter but more frequent meetings, and ensure that the longer sessions have good breaks in them. The Saturday afternoon session was timetabled as 2-6pm: but there was an hour’s break in the middle. Even so, it was hard work and required deep concentration!

Seven task groups were set up at the November committee meeting: six to address specific topics, and the seventh to begin working out how to ‘tag’ all the submissions to the committee so that we could easily search for them by subject as needed. Many of us

are working on more than one topic at the same time, and the reports from the convenor of each group showed that, while some groups had made substantial progress, others had been unable to make much progress, for a variety of reasons.

I'm in the Discernment group. When we began to work on the topic we encountered various questions on which we needed guidance from the committee: as the other groups reported on their work it became clear that some questions are common to a number of topics. *Quaker faith and practice* doesn't have any explanation of what discernment is or how it works: presumably when it was written it was assumed that 'everybody knows what it is so we don't need to explain it' – this is definitely not the case now. Discernment also features largely in almost every other topic that the groups are working on [including Nominations, Membership and Trusteeship], as well as other topics that have been worked on previously or are yet to be worked on. We want to avoid duplication of effort and so need to consider how the 'discernment thread' is to be woven through the other topics, and who will do the weaving. This is a complex matter, to which we will return in future meetings, as it materially affects the structure of the book and the way sections relate to each other.

I'm also part of the Communicating with Friends [CwF] group, which has taken on the work of both the Engaging with Friends team and the Communications team. Five members were appointed in November, and we swiftly realised that we were all already juggling a number of things and needed more members, in particular someone who willing to act as convenor, something we all felt we had not the capacity to do. I'm delighted that our Nominations group came up with two names, which we were very pleased to accept: Anya Nanning Ramamurthy and Nuala Watt. They are happy to co-convene; they are both young and well in tune with the multifarious ways in which people are now able to communicate electronically; and they are both extremely enthusiastic about the task of reaching out to Friends and ensuring that

as many as possible are able to engage with and in the revision process.

Our Sunday morning session opened and closed with worship, and managed to cover a considerable number of topics. Consideration of the project management group led to a wide-ranging discussion about the problems some of us are experiencing in using Teams – it is hoped that ways can be found to make it more user-friendly for those of us who don't use it every day. We had also intended to address the problem of ensuring that we enable everyone to participate in the work of the committee *as they are able*, while preventing burn-out and isolation in the current pandemic. Alas, there was not enough time to give the matter our full consideration, and we will return to this as soon as possible.

I was happy to give a brief report about all the 'gigs' the CwF group has led and is planning to lead, and invite all committee members to take part in these if they want to. January saw some of us visiting Hampshire and Surrey Border AM and West of Scotland AM, while February has a session when the Quaker Arts Network are investigating 'dance and the revision of *Quaker faith and practice* while one of our clerks speaks to her LM as part of their "Friends on Fridays" programme. March sees our other clerk talking to her AM and others among us visiting North Wales AM and the Westerly Friends weekend gathering which would usually take place at Crianlarich. After that we are visiting West of Scotland AM, Lincolnshire AM, and who knows where else: we will continue to offer to visit LMs, AMs and other Quaker interest groups who would like to hear from us. And, of course, we will be planning our involvement with Yearly Meeting Gathering in August!

Your committee also considered our pattern of meetings for the next six months, accepting that they will all be via zoom. Our next full weekend will be at the end of April, but we will meet twice for shorter business sessions before then, and also have a full-on 'social' evening, in addition to the smaller informal meet-

ings that help us to keep connected to the committee and its work. I'm particularly grateful to Tas, who has made a zoom room available for anyone to go into at any time: I tried it recently, and had a lovely time chatting to a couple of committee members whom I don't know so well.

The key messages from this meeting are:

*We are still learning about how to write this book and work as a committee. Currently we're trying out small groups on various topics: some which reflect existing chapters, such as trusteeship and membership, and others which bring together themes from throughout the current book, such as discernment. Looking at these topics also helps us to test out ideas about the possible structure of the book, including how to split our content into core and supplementary areas.*

*In our recent meeting we welcomed new members of the committee and said goodbye to others. Central Nominations Committee is looking for people with lots of different skills to help us as well as other groups – you can tell them about your interests through a simple online form: <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/suggestnames/>*

*We've enjoyed visiting area meetings around Britain, recently on Zoom, and members of the committee can come and speak or run an activity for your local or area meeting or other Quaker group. How about a Q&A session to help people understand what we're doing, a creative session to make your own book of discipline in an hour, or a chance to reflect on especially useful passages in the current book?*

*Plans for Yearly Meeting 2021, to be held online, are unfolding and we hope to see you there. Details to follow!*

**Please continue your prayerful support of our work: we can't do it without you!** ■

**BDRC update – April 2021**  
**Mary Woodward. Portobello & Musselburgh**

**A**s the year unfolds, and we begin to hope that we see signs of an easing of lockdown emerging with the spring flowers, your committee is preparing for another weekend of hard work and prayer.

During lockdown, we've been meeting more frequently, and for shorter periods of time. Following our full committee meeting at the end of January we've had a convenors' check-in that we could all attend if we wished in February; and a shorter, full-committee meeting and a social get-together in March. Alongside this, Friends have been working in their individual topic groups – requiring more zooming – and in other small groups, including the Communicating with Friends one.

Much of our committee business this year has been to do with the work being done by the 'task groups' – six of them writing material on a variety of topics, and the seventh beginning to work out how to 'tag' all the submissions we are receiving so that we can find the ones we need when we reach the appropriate point in our work. In January we had heard how the groups were getting on with their work, and in February the convenors of the groups gave brief reports on how they were getting on, and the questions that were arising out of the work.

Questions which are common to most task groups have arisen in the course of our work – for example, where do we put the extracts from Quaker writings that are relevant to the section we're working on - inserted in the text, or at the end of a section? What level and kind of language do we use? Who are we writing for? Do we need to have all the 'quotes' assembled now, or can they be added later? At the moment we are writing 'core text' – the how and why we do the things we do: 'supplementary' text will contain more detail relating to each topic [e.g. the correct procedures

for a marriage] – do we have to assemble this supplementary material now, or can that be done later? The blurring of boundaries between topics is an issue for almost everyone - in our Discernment group we were wondering how much Quaker history to include, to explain how and why the process emerged, and how much to write about all the other areas in which discernment has to take place – e.g. clerking, nominations, membership, etc. Other issues were also touched on, especially the problems that a number of us have in using, or trying to use the dreaded Microsoft Teams.

We broke into small groups to talk about two of our common issues – determining the language we use, and the issue of boundaries. So much needs to be said on some topics [again, Discernment is a good example] that it can result in extremely dense text: but we need to have simple text, easily understood by everyone – the richness can come from the Quaker ‘quotes’.

Someone suggested having a ‘beginners start here’ chapter, which might assist in the navigation of the book and be more welcoming than simply plunging straight in to the main body of text.

An electronic text will both need and enable a completely different and more complex navigation system than that required by a printed text: how do we make it easy to find what you want in the printed version?

How much do we spoon-feed readers, and how much expect that they will take the responsibility to insert a Babel fish in their ear and find the meaning within texts whose words they find challenging? Can we make sure to use 21<sup>st</sup> century language in the text we ourselves produce? Can we ensure inclusivity of language [e.g. not just using ‘he/she’ but also using ‘they’]? One of our newest members pointed out that writing things “simply” can be very difficult but we must make the effort and take as much time as is needed.

Our clerks undertook to read and digest the notes taken in all the breakout groups, and feed them back to us so we can apply them in our work.

I found it very helpful and enriching to be in the small groups, both from the discussion of the topics and in getting to know people better. Someone else I spoke to afterwards found their group tedious and a waste of time...

Our March group began with another ‘getting to know you’ go-round: because of our limited time, it was simply “*say your name and a favourite word*” – the variety was fascinating! [I chose *swithering*]. We spent time in small groups considering whether the guiding principles we drew up at the beginning of our work are still relevant now, or whether anything needs changing or adding to them. Once again, our clerks undertook to absorb what was fed back: and a revised principles document is to be considered at our April meeting.

We also looked at a paper about how we produce and deal with ‘supplementary material’ – the additions and extensions to our core text. I have to confess to have found the paper hard to read and grasp when it was sent out and, knowing I was not alone in feeling overwhelmed by the amount of paper we received shortly before our meeting, was moved to say that I was just about managing to keep my head above water with the work I was already doing and found it really hard to cope with new material at such a late date. [I am sure that, had we been meeting in person, I would have found the opportunity to grab someone in a quiet corner and ask for an explanation – this simply isn’t possible in a zoom meeting!]

I was greatly heartened by one of our number reassuring us – we are not expected to produce finished pieces of work! We could expect to receive suggestions for suitable material from the whole

committee, and didn't need to think that we had to find and/ or read everything anyone had ever written on any topic. Our primary task, it was emphasised, was to produce the core material, and to make notes of anything we came across that might be useful in the supplementary sections. We were also reminded that other central committees might be doing work that was directly relevant to ours [e.g. the current consideration of the use of the words 'elder' and 'overseer'].

We heard about our plans for sessions to offer at our virtual Yearly Meeting Gathering in August [though the 'special interest groups' will be holding their sessions in July, with the business meetings' weekends bookending the week when the Gathering was to have been held. We are offering four sessions – one introductory, one 'follow-on', one creative, and one in Welsh, to which Welsh speakers are invited to bring passages they would like to offer for the new Book. I'm very happy to say that I am not one of the people masterminding our presence at YMG – our co-clerk Rosie Carnall is doing this with Rhiannon Grant.

My hands have been plenty full enough with the management of our 'gigs diary' – responding to invitations for the BDRC to visit AMs, LMs and interested groups, liaising with the person inviting us to find out what sort of session they envisage – when, how long, what for, how many for, etc. – and finding volunteers to take part in planning and delivering the sessions. We've visited many parts of the UK – and are now beginning to consider how we can deliver 'in person' sessions, with all the logistical questions that arise such as time and cost of travel [and possibly accommodation], who pays for that, and how many committee members can reasonably attend a session: none of which matter when you're visiting via zoom!

At one point I was finding this work more than enough to keep me busy, without taking into account that I was also meant to be contributing to the Discernment text: I also realised that I had a

considerable amount of information about all this locked in my various devices, and that if I fell under a bus it would be very difficult for anyone else to access this information! So I asked for help with the overload, and decided that it would be appropriate to add the contact details of each group's 'inviter' to the spreadsheet [on Teams!] recording the details of the gigs – the inviting group, the date, time, nature of the session and which committee members are leading/ taking part.

I realised, too, that it was time for me to stop doing every gig myself! I'm very happy that others on the committee are gaining confidence and organising/ leading sessions by themselves. But I'm not going to give up doing the Scotland gigs! We did one for West Scotland AM earlier in the year, and are going to do one for N Scotland AM in July, while a great time was had by all at the Westerly Friends gathering last month [alas, not in Crianlarich but by zoom]. Many of the gigs start off with the committee members taking part speaking about their own Quaker experience, and their experience of being on the committee – and it's fascinating learning about them, and seeing their different approaches to using *Quaker faith & practice* and being on the committee. Finola, one of our newer members, has taken part in a number of gigs now, and I'm really looking forward to getting to know Marcie and Pearl, our newest members, when they feel ready to join the 'concert party'.

Many gigs follow much the same pattern – information about the committee and our work, told from individuals' points of view, followed by small group discussions, whole group session sharing, and maybe a question and answer session. Whatever length the session is, it's never long enough! We were blessed at the Westerly Friends gathering with having two sessions – one informative and inviting discussion, the other offering opportunities for creativity in a variety of ways. As more Friends invite us to hold a 'beginners session', we are thinking about what a 'follow-up' session might look like – the first of these will be on offer at

Yearly Meeting Gathering, which others on the committee will be organising.

We had a ‘whole committee’ social at the end of March, which was most enjoyable, especially when we were randomly sorted into small groups – it’s harder to get to know people via zoom when there’s a lot of them together and no-one’s quite sure how to/when to speak... I’ve also been working closely with a number of people in the Discernment group and the Communicating with Friends group, some of whom I already knew from previous work groups, and others of whom are newer to me, and all of whom it’s a pleasure to know and work with.

Our Discernment group papers are to be discussed in our meeting at the end of this month, along with our revised Principles document and the piece produced by the Nominations task group. Our group has produced two papers – one a simplified version of the other – and a list of questions arising, and I’m really interested to know how these are received and where we go from here. I’m also fascinated to find out how the whole committee works on a paper – it’s been hard enough at times with only four of us doing the work!

Unfortunately, this may be impossible for me, as I’ve been appointed BYM representative to Finland Yearly Meeting, which is happening [via zoom] the same weekend. Even with the two-hour time difference, it’s not going to be possible either physically or mentally to be present at both events, so I’ll mostly be relying on my committee buddy, Judith, to fill me in and explain the process and what happens next.

So for myself personally I’m asking for your prayers as I juggle the Book and the Finns [and my attempts to learn Finnish]. The rest of the committee are juggling things equally complex: please continue to uphold us in our work for you! ■

**BDRC update for SESAME – May / June 2021 .  
Mary Woodward. Portobello & Musselburgh Meeting.**

**H**aving been appointed by Britain Yearly Meeting to attend Finland Yearly Meeting, I was unable to take part in the most recent BDRC committee meeting, as both events took place during the last weekend in April. Thanks to our practice of appointing buddies for those who are unable to be present at our meetings, I was able to get a good understanding of how things had gone.

I was delighted to learn that Juliette Chandler, another younger Friend, was appointed to the committee at April's Meeting for Sufferings. She will join Pearl and Marcie in their 'committee buddy bubble' with Jess and Anya, who will ensure that she very soon feels part of us.

The main business was the consideration of two papers which were presented for comment and questions - one was from the Nominations task group and the other from the Discernment task group of which I'm a part. I was sorry to miss seeing how papers that a small group has worked on are dealt with in a larger group situation – but will have many more opportunities to see this when others' papers are brought to future meetings.

Here's part of the minute about our paper:

*We are profoundly grateful for the text that the Discernment group have brought us which provides an insightful and clear introduction to Quaker discernment. We are clear that there should be a substantive piece on discernment in the Book of Discipline, as part of providing the core knowledge that we must have to 'do Quaker' in Britain. Discernment is at the core of our Quaker way and this should be reflected in the content of this section and the way that it is presented.*

*We ask the group to take on the comments from Friends during our meeting to update their draft and provide us with a version we could consider final for now.*

It's good to know that our paper was well-received! We've already begun combining into one text the two papers we presented, and thinking how to take on board the comments, which include "there needs to be more about waiting". We have another zoom session at the beginning of June.

We had a committee 'check in' meeting May, in which representatives of the task groups reported how their work was going and any problems or questions that had arisen. One of the challenges we face is *to what degree can we assume that the reader has read all or any of the preceding material in the Book?* Given that many people prefer to dip into things rather than read consecutively, how much do we repeat things [e.g. explaining discernment] in however many sections they appear, or do we simply say everything once, and hope people can find it when they need to? The answer to this question will materially affect what and how we write! One Friend coined a lovely phrase - *the encyclopaedic merry-go-round* - to describe the cross-referencing confusion that could result from trying to link everything to everything else: not too difficult in an electronic version of the Book, but a nightmare to create in hard copy.

We need continually to consider where we go next, and in small groups we talked about whether we thought we should work on more topics or start considering some of our key questions. It was good to talk in a small group which included at least one committee member I don't know particularly well, and interesting that we were divided – some for topics, some for questions, and some for a mixture of both. Fortunately we didn't have to decide, merely feed back to the clerks for their deliberations.

The Communicating with Friends group has a meeting in early June, when among other things we'll discuss how to make our willingness to speak about our work known as widely as possible. We've visited large and small Meetings in England, Scotland, and Wales, but many people aren't aware of our work and the part they can play in it. I recently wrote a report on our 'gigs so far' for our next committee meeting – on paper it doesn't sound as though we've done a great deal – nine visits so far this year, and another six already booked for later in the year – but that's before you start to factor in the planning, organisation, and delivery of each gig!

Two of our future gigs are [Covid permitting] 'in person' rather than via Zoom. This raises many new questions about time, cost, and personnel: it's expensive if I offer to do a gig in Cornwall – but what if there's no-one living nearer who is willing and able to do it? What if we have six gigs booked for the same area in a short period – we can't expect the same people to do them all. How many gigs is it reasonable to expect to be able to do in, for example, a month? This will be something the committee as a whole has to consider as we hope we are moving towards being able to travel more widely – doing the gigs in person is good, but it's also great to Zoom in with a group of committee members who have widely-differing personal and Quaker experience to contribute to the sessions.

And then there's the BDRC's involvement in Yearly Meeting Gathering – blessedly not part of my brief! More information will be widely available soon, but I can reveal that we will be doing three sessions – one 'basic introduction to the Book and our work', one 'next steps' one, and one for Welsh speakers to consider what Welsh language material might be included in the new Book.

Our next full committee meeting is half a day in mid-June and there's a social get-together at the end of June. We have a full

committee weekend in early July – and of course the small group work continues...

The key messages from our April committee meeting are:

*We have been considering Quaker discernment and nominations in detail, producing draft text and exploring the issues raised. Work on these topics is helping us to understand different ways to split up our core and supplementary material. We are asking questions like: what does every British Quaker need to know to join in with our community processes?*

*We continue to develop the core principles of our work. This includes questions about the sources we use for quotations, the vocabulary we use, and how we make the final version as accessible as possible.*

*We appreciate the support and upholding we are receiving. The size of the task and the need to work remotely can be daunting! We welcome more suggestions of things to include, especially images, diagrams, or videos on discernment, nominations, and other topics. We are also pleased to receive invitations to speak to local or area meetings and other Quaker groups, and will be running sessions at Britain Yearly Meeting - details to follow.*

Please do continue to uphold us and the work we're doing on your behalf. Please also note the invitation to contribute made in the last part of the key messages. Send your contributions to [bdrc@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bdrc@quaker.org.uk) . Thank you in advance, Friends! ■

**Scottish Episcopal Synod via Zoom 10-11 June 2021. Quakers/  
GM Ecumenical and Interfaith.  
Mary Woodward Portobello and Musselburgh. Meeting.**

I attended the Scottish Episcopal Synods in 2018 and 2019 in person, and thoroughly enjoyed them. 2020's Synod was brief, and on line: this year Synod again had to take place remotely, over two days, and I was delighted to be invited to attend to represent the Society of Friends.

Having already attended the URC Synod and the Church of Scotland General Assembly this year, I was becoming very comfortable with the procedures around joining, voting, indicating the desire to speak, and following the progress of business via the church's Hub. I was delighted to receive the documents in advance in paper form – slightly daunting because of their size, but familiar from past Synods and so much easier to consult/ read/ digest than electronic documents. It was also lovely to see well-known faces, particularly the Primus, Bishop Mark, as he led the opening eucharist and reflected on psalm 23 [the Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want], offered a prayer that we might all *discover that place of quiet waters as we sit in Synod* and reminded us that, although we might disagree in details, we unite in the fundamental, LOVE.

The first session dealt with matters financial and my jaw started to drop... there had been a 36% increase in investment income over the past year [and I'm thinking about how my ISA interest has dropped to near-invisibility!]. Towards the end of the second day of Synod the standing committee on ethical investment gave me more to ponder: the Episcopal church funds its work to a large degree from its investment income - when, if ever, is it right to do 'good work' via the proceeds of 'dirty' investments? In recent years Synod has urged divestment from fossil fuels – but what about secondary investments in them, when unit trust pools do the investing? What about investing in and making loans to

‘undesirable’ countries as part of pool funds? It was really interesting to hear the widely-differing views on the ethics of Doing Good With Bad Money – ranging from ‘*you have to keep the tares because you want the wheat*’ to ‘*avoid all unethical investment*’ [the counter to that being that you risk dramatically reducing income] together with the comment that “*absolute purity may be impractical*”...

Amid all these considerations was the fact that hard decisions have to be taken about how and where the church’s money is best used – if you give monies to A, you take away from B or C, and that the bishops’ work on a Vision Statement and Action Plan would need to take into account the problems of recovery from the pandemic, the environmental crisis, and biodiversity loss. We were put in breakout groups [where I was delighted to encounter my ‘synod buddy’ from 2019, Victoria] and invited to discuss what might need to be part of that vision and action plan, what were the priorities, and how to ensure that all the boards and committees within the church focused on these priorities?

The need to get out of church buildings and engage in the local community was seen as vital, as was working with other local denominations. Inadvertent inequalities can prevent everyone from engaging fully; the structure can become more important than what it’s meant to be doing; statements are all very well but they need translated into action; examining structures from underneath rather than top-down can result in a feeling of ownership; work out how to do communication effectively; and *make it clear that not everyone can do everything...* all things we Quakers would do well to keep in mind and put into practice too.

On the Thursday afternoon there was consideration given to the adoption of a new liturgy – comments could be given but no changes made, as this was just the beginning of the process. Jane Haining, the only Scot to die in Auschwitz, was added to the Scottish Calendar of people remembered on particular days.

Just as at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, time was taken to discuss the St Andrew's Declaration, in which the two churches recognise each other's common aims and purpose, and commit to working together where possible. Sandy Horsburgh, the Church of Scotland's ecumenical officer, reminded us that "*times are tough for churches in Scotland and we need each other*". The Declaration had received enthusiastic support from the Assembly, but a number of Episcopalians had theological reservations. Again in our small groups there was a wide range of views, and I contributed the message of the Quaker poster of the two donkeys – *co-operation is better than conflict*. When we reconvened, it was made clear that the Declaration is the first move in a lengthy process of working out how to acknowledge difference and derive strength from that acknowledgement: it was accepted by Synod.

Friday's business revolved around the Church in Society Committee's Climate Action Plan and Toolkit, which aims to help the Church achieve net zero by 2030. In small groups we talked about our thoughts and actions around climate change, both individually and in congregations – again, the daunting prospect of losing considerable income by divesting from fossil fuels raised its head, and the comment was made "*what message does it give if churches are funding their work with fossil fuel profits?*"

It was felt that some people in the western world seemed more concerned about the loss of animals and plants through climate change than its effects on the people who live in the most challenging conditions. One person spoke of a village linked to their parish where the whole year's crop was washed away by floods; and another, fascinatingly, divulged that he had written an opera libretto about coffee production, consumption and marketing to highlight the problems therein – I wished I could have heard a whole lot more about that!

It's obvious that there is great concern, and also much apprehension about exactly how anything can be done: there was much encouragement, especially to join Eco-Congregation Scotland, and a reminder that this is not a 'once for all time' thing, but one that is constantly changing, requiring constant adaptation to changes in science and politics.

Other business concerned the way bishops are elected, clergy stipends and holidays [beginning to get over the idea that clergy should be given two days off a week, rather than the current one], and creating a robust bullying and harassment complaints procedure.

The final presentation to the Synod came from the Provincial Youth Committee, who had made a video presentation which said loudly and clearly "*we don't need you to ask us, we need you to listen to us and TAKE ACTION - NOW*" and challenged us to consider *what will I have done by next Synod?* We were reminded that the task of saving the planet has to be a collaborative one. The Synod closed with the singing of *all creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, Alleluia!*, reminding us that we are not lords of creation, but one species among many on a tiny planet floating nearly invisibly in the vast cosmos.

Because the sessions were on Zoom, and opportunities to speak were few, I had to content myself with giving the Synod loving greetings from you all via the chat function as we gathered on the first day – I look forward to being able to give them in person next year! ■

Netherlands Yearly Meeting Gathering Online 28-30 May 2021.

Report by Edward Bruce, Britain Yearly Meeting Representative Glasgow LM and West Scotland AM.

"Let us then try what love can do" (William Penn)

"Our life is love, our life is peace, our life is tenderness and bearing with each other, and forgiving and helping each other with a tender hand" (Isaac Pennington)

I want to thank Peter Spreij, clerk, and all Friends at Netherlands Yearly Meeting Gathering for their welcome and support before and during the Netherlands Yearly Meeting Gathering.

The gathering made me regret that I couldn't be there in person due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Despite problems connecting online, I was inspired by the valuable contributions from Kees Nieuwerth and Timmon Wallis. I knew of Timmon's work already from my days on the Northern Friends Peace Board and as former clerk of the Liverpool Quaker Peace Group. Kees work, however, came as a wonderful gift to me as I am very much at a crossroads in my Quaker faith and feeling a concern to reach out to other Christian churches and other faiths in my Quaker journey.

I knew the business, conducted in Dutch, with no simultaneous translation available and documents in advance also only in Dutch, would be beyond my comprehension. I therefore concentrated on the two main addresses, one in Dutch by Kees Nieuwerth\* on Friday and the other in English by Timmon Wallis on the Saturday. Kees had provided an excellent translated text of his talk of which he was able to elucidate a few parts when he broke off to speak in English. Kees spoke of his commitment to ecumenism and his strong belief that this is valuable, and indeed crucial work for our

world. His conviction, that faith groups with all their historical roots, wrongs and rights are a vital part of a healing power for all who live on this planet, struck me the most about him and his work and stays with me. Much of the contemporary narrative we hear on organised religion is proclaiming the harm that it has done and continues still to do. It was therefore extremely revitalising and nourishing to hear Kees' positive message of the good that faith groups bring to the world: the benefits and indeed necessity of coming together as a 'world council' with Quakers playing an active role in this.

I will follow up my experience by writing to Kees and ask more about his work. I will also be getting in touch with Charles Tauber, the conveyor of the Coalition for Work with Psychotrauma and Peace, as we had an interesting conversation in the breakout room on Saturday. He was telling me that his psychological advisor is Bryn Jones, a Friend from Wales.

It was also lovely to meet Martine Kuipers from Groningen and Diana Hedrick from Maastricht and hear of their Quaker work. Martine talked about the 5th May, the Netherlands' Liberation Day when the Dutch celebrate the end of Nazi occupation (1945), following Remembrance Day on 4th of May. This year, the current German chancellor Angela Merkel came to the Netherlands to give an address with the message of peace and to commemorate the liberation of the country from the Nazi regime. The public event was attended by concentration camp survivors who shared their experiences with the German chancellor. Martine said that this was an extremely important event in the history of Europe and the European Union's noble and inspiring peace-building objective.

Diana Hedrick talked of her commitment to handing out copies of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) newsletter to students at Maastricht University. She wanted to emphasise the importance of having paper copies of this as students are inclined to take a leaflet that is offered to them and are more likely to read it than yet another email or attachment in their phone and computer-screen-dominated lives. This is something which can be overlooked in our ecological drive to make all business 'paperless'.

I was inspired by the gathering and my Quaker roots were refreshed by my overall experience with Netherlands Yearly Meeting. I have lots to follow up on! Regrettably, the limited opportunity for social time due to my connectivity problems and the language barrier, and getting to know the Yearly Meeting properly meant that I am still somewhat of a stranger to Dutch Friends and the majority still, sadly, little known to me. I will however continue to uphold Netherlands Yearly Meeting in my prayers and thoughts, and I would be very happy to remain in touch to continue our Quaker links.

\* Kees Nieuwerth, Quaker representative to the European Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. Address to Netherlands Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021: *The Challenge of the Ecumene for and from us as Quakers.* ■

**Joint Report on the Church of Scotland General Assembly (via Zoom) 22-27 May 2021**

**Three representatives: Adwoa Bittle, Elizabeth Allen, Mary Woodward. Quakers /GM ecumenical and Interfaith.**

**Adwoa – Saturday 22 May**

**I**f I start at the beginning I would like to say how impressed I was with the training and communications received from the Church of Scotland before the event. I felt guided and I understood how it all worked. I attended the first day and was thoroughly moved by the words of the outgoing moderator. His passion and sentiment impressed me.

Much of the business of the day was ceremonial, and I greatly enjoyed being in the Ecumenical Zoom room and we had little chats between events. We shared this room with the overseas visitors and over the day became quite a little community.

The organisation of timing and technology was impressive and even with slight issues at the start of the afternoon session, all involved settled into how it needed to work. The parts that I attended were very much welcoming, setting the scene and beginning to settle towards a prayerful event. I was sorry to be working for the rest of the time as I know I missed out.

**Elizabeth – Monday 24 and Tuesday 25 May**

On Monday we began with worship during which communion was celebrated. The Church of Scotland has an open communion and all are welcome to take part. With Covid restrictions, this was 'blended' worship with a few people present in the Assembly Hall, and the rest of us joining by Zoom. Video recordings of hymn singing and sharing of communion at previous Assemblies were played on the screen, which helped draw us together in our common worship.

This year is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the union of the Church of Scotland with the United Free Church of Scotland and of the Act, which established the Church of Scotland as a national church with evangelical and pastoral concern for the people and nation of Scotland. Presbyterianism is constantly evolving, as is to be expected with the reformed tradition and it is doing so within a changing society. We heard from the Commission looking at the Presbyterian Way that looking at a mirror requires courage and discernment and sometimes we fail to see what is really there. All systems of church governance have strengths and weaknesses and changing the system does not always bring desired transformation: what is more important is changing attitudes.

There is a low faith base in Scotland today, compared with one hundred or even fifty years ago, when it was the norm for people to go to church. The Church of Scotland is challenged by a falling membership and income, and owning a large amount of property, which needs to be maintained. Sixty percent of ministers are due to retire in the next ten years and too few are being ordained to replace them. The Church is at a tipping point, which has led it to examine priorities and traditional ways of doing things. There was acceptance of the need to prune and plant, as congregations find new ways of 'being church'. The Assembly agreed to reduce the number of full-time equivalent ministry posts to 600. The church has put in place a lay training programme to support the ministry and it has to consider whether this is well enough resourced and if it would benefit from a more local delivery. But most important, are there sufficient willing and available individuals in the parishes to make this a reality? The assembly was encouraged to cheer up and seek today's possibilities. Good work, even in this time of crisis, has continued and people of faith need to rediscover, and live out again, the joy of the Gospel.

The Church of Scotland is also challenged by civil society's acceptance of same sex marriage. In the deliberations of the pro-

posed change in church law to allow same sex marriage, the Assembly was reminded of their long journey to accept homosexuality. The Assembly voted to allow any minister or deacon who wishes to solemnise same sex marriage ceremonies to apply to become an Authorised Celebrant for same sex marriage. But no one will be required to conduct a ceremony or be involved in arrangements for a same sex marriage. Before this decision becomes church law, under the Barrier Act it will go to the presbyteries for comment and come back to next year's General Assembly for ratification. A number of people insisted that their dissent to this change in church law be recorded.

Increasingly churches are working together but unity does not equal uniformity. We heard that our similarities give us strength but our differences give us even greater strength. The General Assembly approved the Saint Andrew Declaration between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church, which affirms what the churches have in common and lays the foundation for closer co-operation in the future. We heard about the need to be open to possibilities and pioneering ideas like the Maranatha Yoga Ministry in Cumbria and recognising each other's ministries, as is the practice of the Forces Chaplains. Partnerships in mission and service will open new possibilities for the church and communities. Trust is at the centre of Christian faith but it can be a casualty in the church, as well as in society. To work with others, a deepening of mutual understanding, friendship and respect is needed.

### **Mary – Wednesday 26 and Thursday 27 May**

This was my first General Assembly, and like Adwoa I appreciated the tech training and the possibility of support by email or text during the Assembly itself, for which at one point I was very grateful. Reading the above reports, I wish I'd been able to be present on the days preceding my involvement, as some of the matters that came before the Assembly would then have been

clearer – and were fascinating! I also wish I'd known about and had the stamina to be able to join the ecumenical and overseas visitors in the breaks – one of the downsides of extended Zoom sessions which I hope to be able to rectify at future, 'in person', Assemblies.

Before attending the Assembly I fear I had a very one-and-a-half-dimensional view of the Church of Scotland, imagining it to be composed entirely of “washed in the Blood of the Lamb/ everyone else is damned” believers – how wrong I was! What impressed me most in my two days at the Assembly was the vast extent of concerns to which the Church turns its attention, not just observing but getting stuck in and doing its best to make a difference.

Violence against women, investment in fossil fuels, COP 26, the environmental crisis, deploring the UK government's reduction in overseas aid payments, protesting against 'vaccine nationalism', continuing to build relations and work together with people of other denominations and faiths, and celebrating the re-opening of the refurbished living accommodation in Iona Abbey were all part of the session on the Faith Impact Forum, while the Social Care Council session illustrated the enormous range of care services offered and the outstanding way in which these services rose to the challenges presented by the pandemic, most especially to the most disadvantaged, coming up with ingenious solutions to problems and giving service way beyond the call of duty. The Safeguarding Committee intends to simplify the information on offer, and make it more easily accessible, offering on-line training to people living in remote or isolated communities.

Then we returned to the Faith Nurture Forum and the ongoing business surrounding the decisions taken earlier in the week to bring about significant and challenging reform to the Church outlined in Elizabeth's report above. This was the really hard part of the session both for me, who didn't completely understand

what it was all about, but also for the members of the Church, both clergy and laity who were grappling with the result of years of failing to address a worsening situation and having now to accept that too much is now being asked of too few and that the huge cost of maintaining the status quo is unsustainable. As someone commented, “*we have known [and avoided] for years: now we have to face the reality*”. Bishop Ian of the Episcopal Church reminded us that all denominations are having to face this reality, and urged everyone to *talk to their ecumenical partners and come together with them to address these issues*. Someone else added “*if we don't do something now we won't be here in ten years*” – a strong wake-up call if ever I heard one!

At this point I stopped understanding anything that was happening in an ongoing cascade of amendments and amendments to amendments, many of which were consequent on decisions taken earlier, and I quietly snuck away to recruit my strength for the following day...

Thursday's business was somewhat more challenging, beginning with the report from Chaplains to HM Forces. As with all the other Forums and Committees, a recorded introduction was available on line before the Assembly began, and I'd watched it and taken on board the comment that whether or not one approves of the armed forces, it is necessary to be concerned with the spiritual welfare of the members of these forces. What I wasn't prepared for was an address to the Assembly from an Air Vice-Marshal [I think] who simply gave a propaganda speech justifying the exorbitant amount of money allocated by Westminster to the defence budget, saying it was necessary to “PROTECT OUR INTERESTS”, “MODERNISE OUR CAPABILITY”, and look at “NEW THINKING AROUND EXPLOITING NEW TECHNOLOGY and AUTOMATED DELIVERY” in response to the threats lurking everywhere...sorry about the capitals, but the whole speech made me SO angry!!

We then returned to the unfinished business of the Faith Nurture Forum and matters which needed tidying up from the previous three days' sessions. Another telling remark was "*this is hard and will be painful but it has to happen*"... and finally it was all done and dusted and we could move on, at a brisk canter, to the rest of the day's business.

The Report of the General Trustees highlighted the immense challenge presented by having 'too many churches, in too bad condition, in the wrong places – too many of them Listed buildings as well. There were innovative suggestions about using glebe land to plant trees or make smallholdings, and the possibility of transferring the ownership of buildings to the local community, while ensuring they could still be used by local congregations. Pension Trustees confirmed that the pension schemes were in good shape and in surplus.

The Nomination Committee was asked to consider holding meetings at times that working people can make, but responded that this wasn't within the committee's remit. It was also urged not simply to listen to young people's voices, but to HEAR what they are saying; consider a better gender balance; use zoom; vary meeting times; and get on the road instead of being Edinburgh-centric! A search group was to be set up to find five members, including one Young One, for a new Special Committee on Ethical Investment, which would look at the work of the Church of Scotland Investors Trust, with special attention to "non-financial considerations" – i.e. environmental, social and governance ones.

All this had been raced through because at 4pm a mighty gong was rung and Wills and Kate came in to the Assembly: he had been appointed the Queen's deputy for this year, and she stood or sat silently and decoratively beside him. His address seemed to be a plea to Scotland not to leave the Union, disguised as a "how much my wife and I enjoyed our visit to Scotland and the opportunity to revisit our student days in St Andrews"... I was struck

during the procession with the thought that Scotland's Independence could materially affect the Church's relationship with the Crown – not least, would the latter continue to send a representative to the Assembly?

Then there were the finishing touches – the heartfelt thanks, the looking forward to next year, the appreciation of the hard work done, especially that of the IT team who made all their jiggery-pokery seem, most of the time, effortless, and the acceptance of the many challenges ahead, which all present had accepted, never suggesting that things should remain as they are.

“What a family this is”, said the Moderator in his closing address. Yes indeed, what a family! There was always humanity and, to my surprise, humour on display even from the oldest present. There was a good number of strong confident women – but very few people of colour. The Moderator's final comments “the sooner we get the structures sorted, the sooner we can get on preaching the kingdom” jarred somewhat – but then, consider that ‘preaching the kingdom’ can also mean ‘be patterns, examples’ and ask us to practise what we preach.

And suddenly it was all over, and I can look back with enjoyment and forward in hope to be invited to attend next year to continue my education about what the Church of Scotland really is... ■

## POETS' CORNER

### **It's not your fault** **Les Derbyshire, Dorset**

It's not your fault  
You were never there.  
Each evening, stepping out  
Of the big oval photo  
Above the piano  
In the best room,  
You rode through the dark  
To where that mystery, "work"  
Claimed the hours of your night.

And the table was never bare,  
My toys and I had our home,  
The milkman and the postman called  
And the coals on the back-room fire never failed  
To entrance with their fantasy-scenes.  
My world was filled with aunts and doctors  
Red buses and grocery shops,  
With stories and hot-water-bottles  
And your name.

And each morning  
Before I woke  
Your bike came home to the garden shed  
And you to the 'don't disturb' room  
At the front of the house.  
Until, that is, the day when it didn't.  
And how does a child grieve  
For a big oval photo  
And a name?

## **Dancing Branches**

**David O'Donoghue, Eustace St Quakers.**

Can God's voice be found in the wind?  
Is a tranquil breeze her way of saying:  
"Don't be alarmed, perturbed or afraid.  
Things will calm down.  
We will be on an even keel again.  
We will find balance and peace of mind"?

But what about a storm?  
Is that when God is angry or disturbed?  
Is she saying Mother Nature just wants  
to blow off steam for a while?  
"I've had a tough time recently.  
I'm upset when you lot make bombs,  
destroy huge forests, and generally  
make a mess of your world."

So, is the tempest a sign of divine exasperation?  
We may never know until we get to the great beyond.  
And even then, who'll be there to explain it all  
to the bewildered ones?

**Memories on Filey beach**  
**Evelyn M. Shire**

Where smooth North Sea and bright mackerel sky meet  
in blue mist haze horizon  
an eternal sense of one-ness  
seagulls rise on welling thermals  
while white waves sparkling silver  
sweep forward, to break in surging foam  
then glide effortlessly across wet sand

Bempton's sheer cliffs fading into misty Flamborough headland  
rocky ledges nestling gannet and puffin  
below steep coastal paths

Flooding memories of Portmarnock strand expanse  
As far as Lambay island and Howth Head,  
rocky ledges nestling kittiwake  
below steep coastal paths

**No Mow May**  
**Lysana Robinson. Skye**

World leaders of the G7  
arrive in Cornwall today  
to discuss and pledge how  
to change the world for the better.

They have great big ideas  
and plans for huge changes,  
Climate Change, Covid-19,  
the plight of the world's poor.

Today I met in my garden  
with a fellow local environmentalist  
to share our knowledge and plans  
for creating our small wildlife ponds.

No Mow May has been a delight.  
My eyes have feasted on  
colourful wildflowers in full bloom  
as they have nourished bumble bees.

I was filled with excitement  
on finding Self-Heal leaves  
appearing in patches of lawn,  
hitherto, the sole domain of grasses.

My wildflower meadow is expanding  
and filling with new species.  
I'll never know the consequences  
of my small acts of love.

