

SESAME

Number 230: June 2020

AM by Zoom on 27 June/UBI – *two new books*/QLRC/Green Challenge update/Meeting for Sufferings/Sanctuary Everywhere in Scotland/NFPB/Jonah in Scots/Book of Discipline Revision/General Meeting for Scotland/'A Picture of Hope'/Darkness & Light/Ethical Investment Upheld ... Sanctions called for/Leadership at a difficult time/AM May Minutes/*etc.*

ART THOU IN THE DARKNESS? *Mind it not, for if thou dost it will fill thee more, but stand still and act not, and wait in patience till Light arises out of Darkness to lead thee. Art thou wounded in conscience? Feed not there, but abide in the Light which leads to Grace and Truth, which teaches to deny, and puts off the weight, and removes the cause, and brings saving health to Light.*

James Nayler (1659)

These words, from Quaker Faith & Practice, 21.65, were shared by the Book of Discipline Revision Committee at the start of their April meeting – see page 13. For more on Darkness and Light, see page 17.

Published by South East Scotland Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Material for the next issue should be sent to Alan Frith (email: ar.frith@btinternet.com) or by post to 10, East Parkside, Edinburgh EH16 5XJ, to be received at the latest by **Tuesday 18 August**. The Editors reserve the right to condense articles. If possible, please submit articles by email sending as an attachment *and* in the body of the email. An email version of *Sesame* is available in PDF format. Contact the Editors.

SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND AREA MEETING

The next Area Meeting will be by Zoom at 10.00 am on Saturday 27 June.

The main topic will be to look at a **just transition away from the COVID-19 emergency**: what are our opportunities, when the poorest have suffered worst under the pandemic, to create a new normal which is better than the one we leave behind? We will have a guest speaker, **Kate Whittaker** from **Friends of the Earth Scotland** to introduce us to the topic, and we will spend time in small groups looking at our experiences, and the options for action at a personal, local and wider levels.

In normal times, this would have been one of our all-day meetings, hosted by South Edinburgh local meeting. Instead, we will devote the morning to it, finishing by 1.00 pm. As things stand, there will be no children & young people's programme: however, if you would like your children and young people to have special activities during this time, please let me know and we can arrange some break-out space.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

- 10.00 am Gather for Quaker worship and necessary business
(See agenda opposite)
- 11.00 Break
- 11.30 Scene-setting and introduction – *Kate Whittaker, FoE Scotland*
- 12 noon Break-out groups on five main topics:
- Public services for people not profit
 - Protect people on low incomes; redistribute wealth
 - Transform society & economy
 - Strengthen democracy & human rights
 - Offer solidarity across borders.
- These topics have been taken from a letter to the First Minister signed by over 30 groups from civic Scotland, including Elizabeth Allen on behalf of Quakers in Scotland. We feel they fit well with Quaker values.*
- 12.30 Reconvene in plenary to prepare a minute and consider any further action to be taken
- 1.00 Finish.

Alastair Cameron

AGENDA

1. Worship and introductions
2. Minutes of the meeting of Tuesday 12 May 2020
3. Matters arising from the minutes :
 - (1) *Local development worker* (2020/05/03.1 refers)
 - (2) *Yearly Meeting Gathering* (2020/05/03.2 refers)
 - (3) *Update on 7 Victoria Terrace* (2020/05/04.1 refers)
4. News from local meetings
5. Membership matters
6. Area Meeting Appointments
7. Campaign Against the Arms Trade – *report of appointment of worker*
8. Reports:
 - (1) *Meeting of Elders & Overseers, 8 June*
 - (2) *General Meeting, 13 June*
 - (3) *Meeting for Sufferings*
9. Correspondence
10. Conferences & events
11. Just transition following the COVID-19 emergency
 - *Guest speaker, Kate Whitaker from Friends of the Earth Scotland*
 - *break-out groups*
12. Closing minute

Universal Basic Income – “The time has come”

COVID-19 has given fresh impetus to the serious consideration of universal basic income. Petition 302284, calling for UBI to be implemented across the UK during the crisis, has passed the 100,000-signature threshold for it to be debated at Westminster, and the Scottish Government is keen to introduce it in Scotland; the phrase quoted is the First Minister’s, in one of her daily briefings in May, as reported here:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/universal-basic-income-ubi-scotland-uk-nicola-sturgeon-coronavirus-a9498076.html>

Our Friend Annie Miller, whose *Basic Income Handbook* (2017) is one of the most substantial works on the topic, has two new works published this month. *Essentials of Basic Income* (ISBN 978-1913025588 – 48 pp., £4.99) is a revised, extended and improved version of the booklet of the same title which appeared last year. *A Basic Income Pocketbook* (ISBN 978-1912147625 – 192 pp., £9.99) is a lengthier treatment of the subject intended for academics and policy makers as well as for the general reader. Both are published by Luath Press (<https://www.luath.co.uk/>) from whom they are available to order online while bookshops are closed.

Quaker Life Representative Council

25 April 2020

We are lucky to be living in an age where technology can keep us connected. Thanks to Zoom, and the willingness of so many people to make it work, Quaker Life Representative Council took place virtually on 25 April. I did not know what to expect and was pleasantly surprised that the experience, although different, was as rich and varied as when we are together at Woodbrooke. We seemed to pack a lot into the short day.

At the start of the Council, the tone was set by Juliette Chandler who read out a passage from the Epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting 1991, quoted in the booklet 'Living our Beliefs' ¹:

Through our discussions we recognised our anxieties and fears. We realised that we are individuals and that we are alone but, as part of a loving community, to be alone does not necessarily mean to be lonely. We discovered that it is acceptable to have confused feelings, to be different, to do things our own way. We should not feel guilty when we are wrong, and we appreciate that there must be room for mistakes. There are people who want us to be exactly as we are.'

Gill Sewell, London West Area Meeting then spoke about the rich mix of Quaker inspiration that nourishes her. Our practices, our testimonies, and the direct experience of the divine which first drew her and then kept her in Quakers.

Breaking into our home groups to reflect on the questions

What is at the heart of Quakerism?

What would strengthen us as a Quaker community?

was a stimulating experience and provided much food for thought. Our group came up with more questions, 'Which comes first – what I believe in or what I do?'

The feedback from the eight home groups was much and diverse. The one expression that stuck me the most was "*being a Quaker is not about finding the 'right words' but accepting that our answers to questions about faith are always changing and supporting one another through our spiritual journeys*".

Following on from making connecting with other communities, we learned that

- Woodbrooke offers online worship at various times throughout the week –
guidance page: <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/about/online-mfw>.
- Pendle Hill also offers online worship 30 minutes every day (at 1.30 pm our time, 8.30 am their time).

<https://pendlehill.org/explore/worship/join-us-online-for-worship-in-the-barn/>

Virtual QLRC has a place in our current times and does work but I missed the opportunity of speaking to people face to face on an *ad hoc* basis, the joy of sharing our stories and getting to know each other and the unexpected conversations that often deliver pearls of wisdom or insight.

Katrina McCrea

1. *'Living Our Beliefs'* is available in book or e-book form from the Quaker Bookshop, Friends House, (£6.00/£3.50). Alternatively it may be downloaded as a PDF from <http://www.yqspace.org.uk/living-our-beliefs>. – Ed.

The Green Challenge: Palm Oil Update

In January, the managers at Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House explained to Area Meeting that we had decided to give ourselves some 'Green Challenges', looking at our impact on the environment in our everyday operation, and how we might work more sustainably. Our first challenge was to look at palm oil and its derivatives – its environmental impact, and the products we use (foodstuffs and cleaning products) that contain it.

Several Friends got in touch to point us to articles and research, and there was a piece by Alan Frith in March's *Sesame*. As you can imagine, events have overtaken us – we are now closed to the public, so will not be ordering supplies for the time being. But we thought we should summarise what we've learned, and our plans for the future when we get back to something approaching normality.

We have learned:

- That there are strongly opposing views about this issue! There are some who believe that *any* sort of palm oil production is damaging and unsustainable, but there are those who believe just as strongly that 'sustainably' produced palm oil supports local communities and provides a model that other producers can be encouraged to follow.
- Palm oil and its derivatives are incredibly widespread in foods and household products – because it is a very useful and versatile ingredient. Alternatives are sometimes inferior in performance or have their own drawbacks. For example, butter is a very good alternative, but clearly not suitable for vegan products.
- It's not always easy to identify it as an ingredient. It has such a bad reputation with some consumers that even 'sustainable' palm oil is often hidden in confusing terminology in ingredient lists, because manufacturers know it may put people off.

We looked at the ingredients of the relevant products we usually stock at the Meeting House.

- The vast majority contain palm oil or its derivatives.
- All the food and cleaning product manufacturers that we buy from that *do* use it, use certified sources, mostly covered by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).
- A few belong to other schemes – e.g. Traidcraft has its own scheme called ‘Fair Palm’ (see <https://www.traidcraft.co.uk/fairpalm>), using oil which is organically farmed, and produced sustainably by smallholders in West Africa. Doves Farm, while also using RSPO certified products, source their oil from organic plantations in South America, which they say are making a positive impact on local communities and adhere to the standards of the Sustainable Agriculture Network (<https://www.dovesfarm.co.uk/faqs/palm-oil>).

We feel that the best way forward is to:

- Try as far as possible to buy products that either do not use palm oil, or use sources that have enhanced certification (*i.e.* Traidcraft or Doves Farm) where there is a clear intention to uphold high environmental and ethical standards.
- Continue to monitor ingredients (which change over time), research, and information, and adapt our plan accordingly.

We welcome further input from Friends and will keep this issue under review.

Sue Proudlove & Tony Wilkes

Two Obituaries

The Guardian has recently in its “Other Lives” column included notices of two lately deceased Friends, accessible online and which may be of interest to anyone who missed them.

Andrew Clark, who from 1982 to 1999 was General Secretary of Quaker Peace & Service (the forerunner of Quaker Peace & Social Witness), is remembered here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2020/jun/07/andrew-clark-obituary>

The adventurous life of our Friend **Monica Jackson** is described by Simon Jackson here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/26/monica-jackson-obituary>

Friends might also be interested to know that secondhand copies of two of Monica’s books, *Tents in the Clouds: the First Women’s Himalayan Expedition* (1957) and *The Turkish Time Machine: An Off-beat Journey of Exploration* (1966), can be bought online. The former was re-issued in paperback by Seal Press in America some years ago and may still be available.

Meeting for Sufferings, 6 June 2020

All the papers for the meeting are available online at

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2020-06-agenda--papers>

The minutes and other follow-up material are available from

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2020-06-follow-up-package>

Cancellation of 2 April Meeting for Sufferings

The meeting scheduled for 2 April was cancelled. A letter including a number of the reports that would have been considered at that meeting was circulated to members, and is available at

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/information-members-mfs-april-2020>

It contains a report from Trustees, an interim report from the Review Group for Quaker Stewardship Committee, and, perhaps most importantly, *Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke Integrated Strategy for Supporting Quaker Communities 2020-2025*, produced by Quaker Life Central Committee. It gives more detail than previously available about the plans for the new approach to many of the structures and activities of Britain Yearly Meeting.

BYM Trustees report

COVID:

80% of the staff of the Quiet Company (responsible for running Friends House and Swarthmore Hall) and 50% of Friends House staff have been furloughed.

COVID notwithstanding, the focus for fundraising going forward will be on systematic funding growth for the long term, not a single crisis appeal.

Hiring of new Local Development Workers and the establishment of the first regional Hub have been postponed.

Online activities improve accessibility for some, but make it harder or impossible for others. Are we (South East Scotland AM) looking at identifying and helping those who lack either the skills or the hardware to participate?

Yearly Meeting

There will be an abbreviated virtual YM on the afternoon of 15 September, comprising two one-hour sessions. Attendance will be open, but with early notice required, and capped at 1000.

The sessions will include some necessary business and shared worship.

Meeting for Sufferings is to be empowered to do some required business between then and the YM in 2021.

Yearly Meeting Gathering will be held, God willing, in summer 2021 in Bath.

Small group session

Some Area Meetings are looking to continue holding their Area Meeting online and/or doing some Area Meeting business online “after COVID”.

Some form of go-around or after-word is happening in some places.

People with mobility issues found regular attendance to be very welcome.

One Area Meeting is holding a weekly online Epilogue.

There were many questions about hybrid meetings “after COVID” (also called ‘blended meeting’).

Ellie Harding reported: “I have been to a blended memorial before – happy to pick up separately if useful. It was held at Liverpool meeting, so their elders might be worth reaching out to as well.”

Anna Sharman asked: “Is it really silence if there couldn’t be noise?” (Her online Meeting has experimented with leaving people unmuted unless there’s a lot of background noise.)

Some problems with online meetings that were mentioned:

- “It’s difficult to reach out to new people”;
- A few people have resisted the concept as unQuakerly ...
- Technology and/or financial issues exclude some people;
- One eldering problem has arisen, resulting in lack of unity on the value of the online meetings ...
- In one case where there is no online Area Meeting, a Local Meeting that chose not to meet online has left those members who *would* like to do so out in the cold.

Henry S. Thompson

South East Scotland AM representative

Sanctuary Everywhere in Scotland – 30 May 2020

An opportunity to hear about changes in legislation for new arrivals in Scotland and explore what is required of us as a community, this online meeting for learning attracted 22 Scottish Friends. It had been planned before the COVID-19 pandemic forced it onto Zoom, but the format seemed to work, giving participants greater understanding of migration issues and pointing to ways of getting involved in initiatives to welcome newcomers, and of advocating for a more just migration system.

Susan Mitchell of Dunblane Meeting welcomed everyone. It had been hoped we would have with us Tatiana Gavarito, the programme manager at Friends House of Sanctuary Everywhere [whose thoughts on joining it are at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/join-the-sanctuary-everywhere-movement>], but we were glad to welcome Lyndsay Burtonshaw, Coordinator for QPSW Turning the Tide, as co-facilitator.

When Sanctuary Everywhere was being set up, Tim Gee wrote:

Europe is experiencing the largest number of refugees since World War II. This is bringing attention to a steadily growing global crisis of human displacement, born of war, inequality and environmental degradation. More than 50% of the people fleeing their homes are escaping countries formerly colonised by Britain. Despite this, the UK currently hosts less than 0.5% of the world's refugees. (Quaker News 97 – 2017)

Many Sanctuary Meetings in Scotland are semi-rural, don't own a meeting house and have an older membership – all of which put limits on what can be done. What this gathering showed was the appetite for working together on this concern, and for doing more.

The organising group – Susan Mitchell, Fiona Paterson, Kate Philbrick Esther Shreeve and David Somervell – have compiled a full report of the event which is at www.bit.ly/sanctuary30may.

Northern Friends Peace Board, 20 June

The Northern Friends Peace Board met by Zoom on Saturday 20 June; at the suggestion of the AM Nominations Committee and with the approval of the Clerks, I attended on behalf of South East Scotland Friends. There were 27 Friends participating in all or part of the meeting, which under normal circumstances would have been held in Glasgow.

Despite lockdown, the co-ordinator, Philip Austin, had been busy since the Board's last meeting, as the networks of which NFPB is a part have tended to have meetings more frequently online than they used to do face to face: as well as informal meetings with QPSW he had been engaged in a UK working group on the Global Campaign on Military Spending; the Network of Christian Peace Organisations; a working group on Arms Conversion/Defence Diversification; the outreach group of Rethinking Security; and ICAN [the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons]. He also reported on webinars organised by Medact and Forces Watch, on a Europe-wide "conversation" on COVID-19 and its implications, organised by the Quaker Council for European Affairs, on events around International Conscientious Objectors Day, and on a new feature of the NFPB website:

<https://nfpb.org.uk/2020/05/07/nfpb-voices-ww2-reflections/>

There was discussion of a three-page paper on NFPB vision and strategy.

Among many interesting items in the Members Forum were: news that Glasgow University is divesting from the arms industry; several mentions of a play, *The Mistake*, due to have been staged at the Edinburgh Festival 2020 (see <https://michaelmears.org/the-mistake-a-new-play-about-the-day-the-world-changed-forever/>); updates from Janet Fenton about events for the 75th Anniversaries of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings; and, from Douglas Shaw, news of BLM protests (and counter-protests, alas) in Biggar.

Alan Frith

Jonah in Scots

It was as a teaching aid that our Friend Hugh Pyper, Emeritus Professor of Biblical Interpretation at the University of Sheffield, made this, the first Scots translation (so far as we know) of this story from the Old Testament; he had found that “groups who are studying the Bible in English often lack the sense of the strangeness of these texts and have little notion of the ambiguities inherent in the process of translation. Being exposed to a Scots version of the text allows them to experience something sufficiently different to raise issues of translation but without the impenetrable barriers of the Hebrew alphabet and its unknown vocabulary and grammar.” Published in Looking through a Glass Bible: Postdisciplinary Biblical Interpretations from The Glasgow School, ed. A.K.M. Adam & Samuel Tongue (Brill, 2014) it is reprinted with permission but without footnotes. Ed.

THE BUIK O JONAH MACAMITY AS OWERSET BY HUGH S. PYPER

NOO THE WURD O THE LORD cam tae Jonah MacAmity: “Up ye get”, quo he, “an awa tae Nineveh, thon muckle toon, an cry agin it; fur their ill-daeins hae come up in my face.” Sae up Jonah gets—tae flee tae Tarshish, oot o the Lord’s face. He gaed doon tae Joppa, an fun a skiff bund fur Tarshish. He peyed his fee an gaed doon intae her tae gang wi them tae Tarshish, oot o the Lord’s face.

But the Lord flung a muckle gowst on the sea an there was a muckle storm on the sea, sae that the skiff was minded tae break intae shivers. Then the auld sauts were feart an ilkane cried tae his ain goad; they flung the gear oan the skiff intae the sea, forby, tae lichten it fur them.

Noo Jonah had gaed doon intae the wame o the skiff, lain doon an fa’n intae a dwam. Sae the heid keiler cam an said tae him, “Whit’s wi ye, ye snoiterer, ye? Up ye get an cry tae yer goad! Mibbe thon goad’ll tak tent o us, sae that we dinna dee!”

An they said, ilkane tae his nebour, “Come oan, let’s cast caivels sae we can ken wha fur this ill’s on us.” Sae they cuist the caivels an the caivel fell tae Jonah. They said tae him, “Kindly tell us, fur whit an fur wha hes this ill come upon us? Whit’s yer eerant, an whaur are ye frae? Whitna airt dae ye hail frae, an whit’s yer fowk?” An he telt them, “It’s a Hebrew that I am, an it’s the Lord, the goad o the heevans, that I fear, him that makkit sea an dry lan alike.” The men were pit in a muckle gast an they speired at him, “Whit’s this ye’ve dune?” For the men kent that it was frae the face o the Lord that he was fleein for he had telt them.

They said to him, “Whit sould we dae wi ye tae mak the sea lown fur us?” Fur the sea wis stormin an better stormin. He answert, “Fling me intae the sea an the sea will lown fur ye, fur weel I ken that it’s aa thro me that this storm’s come upon ye.” Still an on, the men dug in tae win back tae the land, but they werena able, for the sea wis aye stormin the mair aroon

them. Sae *they* cried tae the Lord, “We beg ye, dinna end us fur this man’s life, an dinna pit innocent bluid tae oor score! Fur, Lord, juist as ye ettled, ye’ve dune!” Sae they picked Jonah up an flung him intae the sea an the sea stood still frae its tirriveein. The men were muckle feart at the Lord, an they sacrificed tae the Lord, an vooed their voos.

NOO THE LORD CAAED UP A MUCKLE FUSH tae swalla Jonah an there wis Jonah in the fush’s wame; three hail day an three hail nights. An Jonah pit up a wurd tae the Lord his Goad frae the fush’s kyte, sayin this:

*I cried out in ma pine tae the Lord an he answert me;
Frae the wame o Sheol I besocht ye an ye hearkened tae my voice.
Ye plowtit me intae the howe, intae the hert o the seas;
The hurl-come-gush wis roon me; aa yer jaws an swaws were ower me.
An I said, “Here’s me pit awa frae yer sicht; ach, tae see yer haillie hoose
aince mair!*

*The watters were aa ower me, up tae ma thrapple; the deip wis aa about me.
Wrack wis wrappit roon ma heid.*

*Tae the verra ruits o the bens I gaed doon; the yetts o the yird were ranced
agin me.*

But ye liftet ma life up frae the heuch, O Lord ma Goad.

*An ma inmaist bein dwined awa, I minded the Lord an ma prayer won up tae
ye, tae yer haillie hoose.*

Them at hauds tae nauchtie whigmaleeries foresak their lealtie.

*But see me; wi a thankful voice will I sacrifice tae ye. Whit I’ve vooed, I will
mak siccar.*

Rescue is the Lord’s daein!”

Then the Lord spak tae the fush an it boaked up Jonah ontae the dry land.

NOO THE WURD O THE LORD cam tae Jonah a second time: “Up ye get, quo he, “an awa tae Nineveh, thon muckle toon, an cry agin it the cry I’m tellin ye.” Sae up Jonah got, an hied himsel to Nineveh, in line wi the Lord’s wurd. Noo Nineveh was a muckle toon richt eneuch an a muckle toon fur goads; three days gangin it wis. Jonah stertit tae gang in-tae the city a day’s walk, an he cried oot, “But forty days, an Nineveh’ll be ower-set!” The fowk o Nineveh lippedened tae Goad; they caaed a fast an the hail clanjamfrie pit oan sacken duds, frae muckle to mickle. When the toon’s speak cam tae the king o Nineveh, he rose frae his royal seat, rave his plaid, pit oan sacken duds himsel an sat doon in the cinners. Then he had a proclamation pit oot in Nineveh sayin this:

*By the decree o the king an his heid men: Man nor baist, kye nor hirsle,
maunna pree naething; they’re no tae eat an they’re no to drink watter. Man
an baist’s tae be cled in sacken duds, an they’re tae cry lustily tae Goad or the
goads, an ilkane’s tae turn back frae his ill-deedie ways an frae the gilravagin
in his nieve. Fur wha kens? The Goad’ll aiblins turn back an tak the rue;
he’ll turn back frae his stramash an we’ll no dee.*

When Goad saw their daeins, an that they'd turned back frae their ill-deedie ways, Goad did tak the rue. He turned back frae the ill he'd said he wud dae tae them an didna dae it.

BUT WHIT A MUCKLE ILL this seemed tae Jonah! Sae ill did he tak it he was bleezin. He preyed tae the Lord an said, "Fegs, Lord, is this no juist whit I said when I wis in ma ain land, at gart me flee tae Tarshish? Weel I kent at ye're a guidwillie Goad, slaw in anger, lippen-fou o lealtie an takken the rue at ill-deeds. Noo, Lord, tak ma life awa frae me, fur better ma daith than ma life!" The Lord said, "Are ye the better fur yer anger?"

Then Jonah skailed frae the toon an sat doon tae the east o the toon; he biggit himsel a bothy there an sat in its scug tae see whit sould come o the toon. Noo the Lord caaed kin o bramble they cry a boak-boak plaunt an he gart it gae up ower Jonah tae be a scug ower his heid an protect him frae ill. Jonah wis unco blyth ower the boak-boak plaunt, wi muckle blythness. Then the Lord caaed up an oobit at the morn's dawin an it struck at the boak-boak plaunt sae it wizened. When the sun cam fu up, the Lord caaed up a birslin wind oot o the East, an the sun struck doon on Jonah's heid sae he wis sweltn. He besocht that he nicht dee; "Better my daith than my life," quo he.

The Lord said tae Jonah, "Are ye the better fur yer anger ower the boak-boak plaunt?" "Better my anger as far as daith," quo he. Then the Lord said tae him, "Ye're vext fur the boak-boak plaunt, that ye didna trauchle ower an ye nivver hed the growin o; ane day's bairn, an deed in ae nicht. An am I no tae be vext fur Nineveh, thon muckle toon, whaur there's mair nor a hunnert an twenty thousan chiels wha dinna ken their left haund frae their richt—an, forby, a bonnie when o baists?"

Book of Discipline Revision Committee – *developments during lockdown*

Following the Zoom committee meeting in April, our co-clerks issued the following key messages.

1. *The Book of Discipline Revision Committee met by Zoom this weekend. We are exploring ways of drafting material through looking at topics such as eldership and oversight, marriage, and the structure of our church government sections. We continue to welcome suggestions for future content which you can share with us through our collection tool: <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/qfp-idea/>*

2. *The Committee have created a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document which can now be downloaded from the BYM website:*

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/quaker-faith-and-practice/revising-quaker-faith-practice>

(scroll down to 'Find out more' at the bottom). If you have questions which aren't covered, please contact us on social media or email qfp@quaker.org.uk (and be

patient as our staff are on furlough and the committee won't meet again until October).

3. We are exploring the possibility of offering some online activities to replace events which would have been held at YMG 2020. Watch this space for details!

At the end of May, the convenors of the four ongoing 'homework' groups mentioned in my update in May's *Sesame* met with the co-clerks and assistant clerk *via* Zoom to find out how the four pieces of work were progressing. It was lovely to see familiar faces and find out how we are all coping [or not] with lockdown, and fascinating to hear how the four pieces of work are getting on. The three writing groups are all making progress in their individual ways, aiming to have something to present and consider at our next scheduled committee meeting in October.

'My' group – the one looking at engaging with Friends – had a more immediate focus. We began exploring the possibilities of utilising the growing network of Quaker Zoom-meetings to join Area and Local Meetings to talk about the revision process and invite feedback. We also wanted to have some online sessions around the time that Yearly Meeting Gathering would have taken place: we weren't sure how these would be possible, but wanted to mourn the loss of YMG and try to engage Friends all round the UK in the ongoing revision process.

And now it gets really exciting! After discussion with Simon Best, Head of Learning at Woodbrooke, I can reveal that we are planning to hold four sessions based on the Special Interest Groups that would have been held at YMG in Bath, in which Friends will have the opportunity to hear how the revision process is going and take part in discussion of how we might *Prayerfully, Joyfully, Creatively* and *Boldly* revise *Quaker faith & practice*. The [free] sessions will be run in July and August: details of how to take part will be released as soon as possible.

We are also investigating ways of inviting Friends to contribute electronically, or in hard copy, to the creative project we would have been offering at YMG, and make something which reflects the way Quakers in 2020 would like their book of discipline to be.

On a personal level, I'm delighted that the hard work your BDRC/YMG planning group put into devising a programme for YMG is being used and not mothballed till August 2021. I'm also fascinated and deeply impressed by the whizzy and creative IT skills possessed by the other members of the group: I stand back admiringly then speak out strongly on behalf of the technologically terrified and those who simply don't have the necessary equipment or skills.

We're still working out all the details, but watch out for invitations to join one or more of the Woodbrooke sessions and to be part of the creative project. I look forward to seeing you all on Zoom in July and August!

Mary Woodward

General Meeting for Scotland, 13 June 2020

General Meeting was conducted virtually, using Zoom, and attracted 74 devices with 80 people taking part.

This was my first General Meeting and I was a little overwhelmed by the amount of papers, the length of the agenda and the fact that I probably would not know anyone there. I should not have worried.

Martin Burnell welcomed us as we joined the Meeting and gave us the essentials on how to communicate using Zoom. We then settled down for the Opening Worship. Nicola Maharg read from *Quaker Faith & Practice* 24:49: a paragraph as true today as it was in 1986 :

People matter. In the end human rights are about people being treated and feeling like people who matter. We are reminded graphically of violations of human rights far away and near at hand. In ignorance or knowingly we all violate human rights. We are all involved in the exercise of power and the abuse of power. The multitude and complexity of the problems of oppression and injustice often seem to overwhelm us. We can do something. Friends are already working in a variety of ways: through international bodies, through voluntary organisations and by personal witness. Those who can give something of their lives to human rights require our support and we can look for opportunities to help those in need around us. At the international level we affirm our support of Friends World Committee for Consultation and other bodies in ensuring that the standards and ideals of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights are attained, that the world does not slip backwards. Above all we must take risks for God: look around us to the people who need help; listen to those who experience oppression; engage in the mutual process of liberation.

London Yearly Meeting

Elizabeth Allen then took us quietly and efficiently through the Business at hand.

2021/22 Dates for General Meeting were amended and agreed.

Names brought forward from GM Nominations Committee were agreed.

Nigel Dower, the Treasurer, took us through the annual report and accounts for last year.

The new Local Development Worker for Scotland is now likely to start in the first quarter of 2021. The four AM Clerks as well as the GM Clerk and Assistant Clerk are to meet soon to discuss what the LDW might do .

There were two items relating to GM Communications:

- GM agreed to take over the running of the 'Quakers in Scotland' Facebook page that volunteers have been supporting and managing thus far, and has asked the Nominations Committee to bring forward the names of two Friends to manage the Facebook page and two Friends to act as moderators;

- To improve communication with and engagement of Friends, Attenders will, for a two-year trial period, be added to GM mailing lists.

We discussed three reports:

Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG)

Joyce Taylor presented the Group's report. Four points stood out for me:

- Members of the Group have been active in Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and in the Stop Climate Chaos UK coalition;
- Filling the Parliamentary Engagement Officer post has been postponed, as it was felt that with some staff being furloughed it did not seem appropriate to take on new staff;
- Nicola Sturgeon has responded to a letter regarding climate action and Green and Just recovery. The original letter and her reply will be placed on the GM website soon;
- Individuals are encouraged to make submissions to the Scottish Government's Just Transition Commission consultation by the deadline of 30 June 2020.

[See: <https://consult.gov.scot/just-transition-commission/just-transition-commission-call-for-evidence/>]

West Scotland Area Meeting COP26 Hub Group

COP 26 – the UN Conference on Climate Change – has been postponed to November next year on account of the pandemic. Martin Mansell updated us on the Hub Group, set up to co-ordinate Quaker activity around the conference, and on the new roles it is fulfilling now.

Report on the ways local and area meetings have maintained communications during lockdown

This was a summary of the feedback received from AMs and LMs to a survey that the GM Communication Group circulated earlier this year. Joyce Taylor thanked all who had replied.

Quoting Woodbrooke research, Joyce asked us to reflect on the statement:

"We have a chance now not simply to return to what we did before but to 'make our own', creatively and adventurously, what is revealed to us by the light and life we have found."

Suggestions going forward included the possibilities of installing video-conferencing facilities in Meeting Houses and that perhaps some of the Jenny Auld legacy might help fund this.

An interesting and informative meeting and I am extremely glad I was there to be a part of it. Any misgivings I may have had were allayed by the warmth and concern of speakers and participants. The breakout session at the end was particularly helpful to me: full of encouragement and helpful suggestions on what to put in my report, as well as reflections on the morning and how we might blend technology with face-to-face meetings.

Katrina McCrea

A Picture of Hope

In the aftermath of the Great War, a group of Quakers travelled to Poland to help with the reconstruction of a country and community broken by four years of war and disease. Villages were practically wiped out because of Spanish influenza and cholera. But the Quakers were fearless. In the village where they served, they tended the cholera victims with patience, care and solicitude, using that language of love which transcends our normal vulgar means of communication. But loving though they were, the Quakers were not superhuman. They fell victim to cholera and died.

The surviving villagers had grown to love these kind and gentle people. They looked on them as strangers who had become their friends. Because they weren't Catholics the parish priest said that the Quakers could not be buried on holy ground. With regret, he insisted that they be buried in a little plot just outside the edge of the churchyard.

Yet, as the village rose from its slumbers on the day after the funerals, a remarkable sight greeted them: in the night the fence of the graveyard had been moved so that the Quakers' graves were inside rather than out.

I've no idea if the events recounted in this story happened quite as described. I'm not sure it really matters. This story – rather like one of Jesus' parables – is truth-bearing and truth-shaping. It draws us closer to our vocation to love, serve and be remade in each other. The story presents a lived and enacted hope.

It is stating the obvious – that we live in a dangerous and violent world. There are countless natural and human crises and disasters. Our vanity and greed condemn generations to war and perdition. The truth is – almost certainly – that it has always been thus. Jesus' time was a riven time. His death is an icon of not only human but state-legislated violence against the living body.

It can feel difficult to figure out what 'hope' looks like, in the modern age as at any point in history. But I always return to the simple human story of people motivated by their faith to serve, and who – in doing so – break down barriers of distrust and fear. Hope is not some vague optimism that the future will be better. Hope is building community based on seeing the human in people we might fear, or see as strange or even dangerous. It is not giving up, even when it might cost us our lives.

Rachel Mann

[This meditation (slightly shortened) is taken from A Star-Filled Grace: Worship and prayer resources for Advent, Christmas & Epiphany (2015) published by Wild Goose Publications, ISBN 978-1849524421. It is used with permission. Wild Goose (see <http://www.ionabooks.com>) is the publishing division of the Iona Community. Rachel Mann is an honorary canon at Manchester Cathedral and was Resident Poet there, 2009-17.]

Held in the darkness and the light?

I sometimes wonder if Quakers ever consider trying to reclaim the concept of “darkness”. As an attender at Westminster meeting I regularly hear ministry referring to ‘the light’, to guide us out of the darkness, or encouraging us to hold someone in the light. ‘The light’ is cast as part of a simple binary to indicate what is spiritually good, positive, supportive and nurturing, as opposed to the darkness, which represents a place of deep turmoil, trouble and depression; personal, political, or spiritual. Although opposites such as good and evil, heaven and hell, or God and Satan do not feature much in modern Quaker discourse compared to that of other Christian traditions, they are reflected in how Friends refer to the light and the darkness.

Yet why is the darkness defined so negatively? Often conceived in darkness, all life has a period of gestation in darkness. Shade and shadow provide protection against unbearable heat and light, which, if too extreme, would blind us and destroy us. Consider this, from *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 22.50:

... Although we tend to equate evil with darkness, we should remember that in the plant world roots grow in the dark. Darkness (and shadows) are as much a part of the natural order as light.

S. Jocelyn Burnell, 1989

The metaphor of light and darkness has a very long-established place in Christianity, and many might ask what need there is to question it. Yet it is worth pointing out that mystics from Meister Eckhart to St John of the Cross *have* questioned it, averring that the experience of darkness may actually lead to spiritual clarity or enlightenment. So the binary is not rigid.

But there is another, perhaps more important reason for a re-consideration of what darkness represents. In the 18th century many Quakers were slave owners or involved in the slave trade. To their credit, Quakers were also among the first to question slavery and divest themselves of involvement in the slave trade. But Quakers like most white people saw black people who were born and brought up in non-Christian beliefs and cultures, at best as ‘noble savages’ and at worst as ‘devils’. Their dark skin was symbolic of their spiritual and moral deficiency. Darkness had a human manifestation that needed to be controlled, suppressed and enslaved by “good” Christian white people. In other words, the binary of light and darkness has racist connotations, if not racist roots.

I am not accusing anyone of being racist just because they refer to the light or the darkness in ways familiar to Quakers. But I do believe it is worth thinking more carefully when we use those terms and reflect how the positive and negative connotations go well beyond what they represent in Quaker belief, and have had profound negative repercussions for how different groups in society are perceived and treated. Perhaps we should hold people ‘to the spirit’ or use the spirit to help us out of ‘troubles’ if we

want alternative wording, and if we do change, understand and embrace the reasons for doing so.

Toby Williamson

With thanks to Karina McIntosh for passing this on.

A Victory – for now ...

Just too late for the last *Sesame* was the news that on 29 April the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom had (by a 3 to 2 majority) upheld an appeal on the ethical investment policies of local authorities in England & Wales.

New government guidance in 2016 had banned authorities from divesting themselves of shares in companies profiting from the UK defence industry, fossil fuel extraction, or military occupation. At the time, Quakers in Britain voiced concern and made written submissions in support of the case brought by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign against the new rules. In the High Court, the Secretary of State for the Communities and Local Government (then Sajid Javid) was held to have exceeded his authority in issuing the guidance, but this was overturned by the Court of Appeal; the Supreme Court has now determined the guidance *was* unlawful. In the words of Lord Wilson: “the Secretary of State has insinuated into the guidance ... an attempt to enforce the government’s foreign and defence policies” – which was not within his power.

In response to the judgment, Oliver Robertson, Head of Witness and Worship for Quakers in Britain, said:

We have been voicing our concerns since the publication of this guidance. We’re delighted and relieved to see the large number of fast-growing campaigns in the UK for ethical investment, including our own, can continue.

We’re pleased the Supreme Court has put an end to these efforts by the government to silence the ethical investment movement. We look forward to moving ahead with our many partners across the country and around the world on campaigns to end a range of unethical trades.

Nevertheless, this victory does not bring the matter to a close. In the Queen’s Speech in December 2019, the government announced that it would proceed with plans to bring forward new legislation to criminalise local authority policies to boycott, sanction or divest from foreign countries and those who trade with them. On this, Oliver Robertson said:

Quakers in Britain will look closely at any proposals laid before parliament. We will continue to work with others to challenge any attempts to clamp down on the democratic right of organisations and individuals to use non-violent tools such as ethical investment to realise positive change in our world.

It will no doubt be argued that, as a matter relating to foreign policy, such a ban should be UK-wide, applying also to Scottish authorities. Indeed, COFIS (the Confederation of Friends of Israel in Scotland) has already said so, predictably asserting that campaigns of this nature are anti-semitic. *Ed.*

... A Battle to Come

The Israeli government led by Binyamin Netanyahu, confident that it has the support of the Trump administration, has announced its intention to defy international law and annex occupied Palestinian territory – exactly how much has yet to be divulged, but, according to UN human rights experts quoted in the *Financial Times* on 17 June, likely in the best case to reduce the West Bank to “a Palestinian Bantustan, islands of disconnected land completely surrounded by Israel and with no territorial connection to the outside world.” US officials have reportedly told Mr Netanyahu that their approval will be forthcoming (according to the *F.T.*) “only if he garners a political consensus and does not upset the peace treaty with Jordan” – the paper also suggests that pressure from Arab and European governments could force a change of plan before 1 July, when the process is to begin. Several thousand Palestinians would either become residents of Israel who lack a vote and other civil rights, or else be confined to enclaves: which some British Jews have attacked as “[making] the unequal and discriminatory legal system in the West Bank formal and permanent, irrevocably harming Israel’s democratic character and the rights of Palestinians.”

In May, 127 parliamentarians of all parties signed a letter to Boris Johnson demanding “robust sanctions” against Israel if annexation goes ahead – 20 more have since done so; some South East Scotland MPs are still to sign.

Leadership at a difficult time

In Meeting for Worship in early May, I felt moved to minister and spoke about Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. This prompted a coffee time discussion and we agreed that I should write to Nicola Sturgeon. I sent a message via the Scottish Government website and received an appreciative reply a few days later from a member of her staff. Here is the message:

Inspirational leadership

I’m a Quaker from Falkirk and a member of Polmont Meeting. We’re currently meeting online. As you may know, Quakers meet in silence, with vocal ministry if anyone feels moved to speak. The ministry today was about the need to pray for Boris Johnson and Donald Trump, even though we might feel great anger towards their policies. As we chatted after Meeting, we talked about how much we value your leadership at this difficult time. We appreciate your strength and wisdom and the clarity of your communication. We like that you don’t pretend to know all the answers. We also like the sensitivity and compassion you show at the daily briefings. When Quakers have someone they care about who is doing something difficult or who needs support, we say we are ‘holding you in the Light’. Polmont Quakers are holding you in the Light just now.

*Mariot Dallas
Clerk, Polmont Meeting*

SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND AREA MEETING

Minutes of Area Meeting held on Tuesday 12 May 2020 by remote videoconferencing

2020/05/01 Worship and introductions

During worship, we have heard a reading from *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 2.11 which reminds us worship can happen anywhere, and that it is not an individual but a collective experience, in which we communicate and help one another.

We have ensured those present know each other's names. The attendance will be recorded in the concluding minute.

2020/05/02 Minutes of Meeting of Thursday 2 April 2020

Owing to the coronavirus emergency, the clerks have been unable to meet. Signed minutes for January and April will be added to the minute book as soon as is practical.

[The full minutes are included in both the print edition of Sesame, and in the PDF emailed to Members and Attenders on the circulation list, but are redacted in this publicly available version. – Editor]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

2020/05/12 Closing minute

40 Friends (39 members and one attender) have been at all or part of this meeting. Local meeting attendance is indicated below:

Central Edinburgh 18	Central Fife 2	East Lothian 4	Kelso 1	Penicuik -
Polmont 3	Portobello & Musselburgh 8	South Edinburgh 2	Tweeddale 2	

We next meet on Saturday 27 June 2020, by Zoom.

(Signed)
Alastair Cameron
Clerk
Cath Dyer
Assistant Clerk

Joanna Swanson has been Assistant Editor of *Sesame* for the past two years. I am very grateful to her for all her work in ensuring the newsletter's efficient distribution and for her occasional contributions to its content, and for her support.

Alan Frith

Quaker Meetings for Worship in South East Scotland

South East Scotland Area Meeting has nine 'Local Meetings' (formerly Preparative Meetings: worshipping groups which meet regularly and conduct some of their own business). None of these, of course, is able to gather in person during the COVID-19 emergency, but six have meetings on a Sunday *via* Zoom. Friends are welcome at any of the Zoom meetings; for login details, please contact the **named person** – whose details are in each case in the Book of Members – or centraledinburgh@quaker.org.uk for Central Edinburgh. (The 'early bird' and midweek meetings which normally take place at the Edinburgh Meeting House are NOT being held during the emergency.)

<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Time (Day, if not Sunday)</i>	<i>Contact</i>
Central Edinburgh <i>(All-age meeting on 1st Sunday in the month.)</i>	11.00 am	[centraledinburgh@quaker.org.uk]
Central Fife <i>(Normally meets on 2nd, 4th and 5th Sundays; has been meeting more often by Zoom.)</i>	10.30 am	Laurie Naumann
East Lothian <i>(Normally meets on 2nd and 4th or (if there is one) 5th Sunday; now meeting weekly.)</i>	7.30 pm (Wednesdays)	Elizabeth Wilson
Penicuik <i>(1st Sunday in the month ONLY.)</i>	11.00 am	Mark Hutcheson
Polmont <i>(Meeting preceded by Children's Mtg, 10.00-10.30. Midweek.mtg, Weds., 8.00 pm)</i>	10.45 am	Mariot Dallas
Portobello & Musselburgh <i>(Normally twice monthly; now weekly. Also Evening mtg, 7.30 pm, 1st Sundays)</i>	11.00 am	Fiona Paterson
South Edinburgh <i>(Weekly as usual.)</i>	10.30 am	David Somervell

Kelso and Tweeddale LMs have not been meeting for worship online.

The Quaker belief contacts for the University of Edinburgh, and also for Heriot-Watt, Edinburgh Napier and Queen Margaret universities, are Rachel Howell and Bridget Holtom; their contact details are in the Book of Members, and soon, we hope, on the Chaplaincy website. *(See also page 30, Minute 2020/05/09.)*

Distribution of Sesame and Scottish Friends Newsletter

The current practice is to distribute one copy of *Sesame* and the *Scottish Friends Newsletter* to every Member and Attender household. Contributions to the costs of *Sesame* are always warmly welcomed by the Area Meeting Treasurer.. An email version of *Sesame* is more ecological and is free; if you would prefer to receive it this way, or to change the address to which a paper copy is sent, or if you would like to get one by post and currently do not, please contact the Editor. A large print version is also available on request. Published by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, South East Scotland Area Meeting, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh EH1 2JL. Scottish Charity No. SC019165. Owing to the closure of Footprint UK, this issue has been produced at 7 Victoria Terrace, and we thank the managers and Majk Stokes for their co-operation.