MANCHESTER & WARRINGTON AREA QUAKER MEETING
NEWSLETTER NO 40 FEBRUARY 2025

Early morning sun rising through the trees on Turn Moss, Chorlton

photo by Robert Wilson

INDEX

Judith Holding

Central Manchester Friends have been saddened to hear that Judith Holding died peacefully at home with her husband Thomas, on Saturday 4th January, aged 80. She had been in failing health for a number of years, but previously had given many years of loyal service to our Area Meeting, in many capacities.

Branwen McHugh, on behalf of CMLM Elders and PCT

Judith as a young woman

MEMORIES OF JUDITH HOLDING

Bonnie Meekums remembers:

My memories of Judy are that she was always there. Judy was one of those Friends you could rely on, and I suspect with a shade of guilt in my heart that we came to rely on her rather too much. But Judy seemed to find joy in service - whether taking on one of the more substantial roles for our community, doing children's work, or serving soup to the homeless. Judy worked for many years in the Planning Department of Tameside Council, and as a result, she knew my husband who also worked there. She lived in Tintwistle before moving to Manchester, and whenever she saw me would open our conversation with 'How's Mossley?' It was comforting to know she knew where I lived. Since her illness, I have missed seeing Judy at Central Manchester Meeting, and I am greatly saddened to know we shall not see her again in that building.

Elizabeth Coleman remembers:

I moved to Manchester at the end of 2001 and have known Judy since shortly after that, when I got to know Manchester Quakers at Mount St. She was one of the most active Quakers of Central Manchester meeting. She was born into a large Quaker family, and her father was a doctor. She went to The Mount (Quaker) School in York. For much of her career, she worked in planning for the Council, but when I knew her, she was nearing retirement, and was a care worker. I think she lived in a Quaker community in Manchester for a time, when she was young.

Judy was full of life and energy, and a hard worker. She was a faithful Quaker, for example always there for Wednesday M for W, helping make sandwiches and drinks, and clearing up afterwards. She lived in

The Green Building, a five minute walk from Mount St, and was often at Mount St.

I liked Judy and think of her as a friend. She and Thomas visited me when I was ill. What I particularly liked about her was her willingness to take things on. She was self-deprecating, with a sense of humour, but confident and willing to become Clerk of various Quaker committees at the same time. She probably didn't do it as well as someone who just takes on one job and does it really meticulously, but people like her are really needed. She was involved in the night shelter, (when we were part of a scheme organised by the Boaz Trust, a local asylum charity, to provide somewhere to stay overnight at Mount St one night a week for destitute asylum seekers) and I remember working as a threesome – me, Ben Wickens and Judy, to organise this. She was also very involved with Lifeshare, a Manchester charity helping homeless people.

She married Thomas when she was in her sixties, I think. Sadly, she developed dementia when in her seventies. Her husband Thomas looked after her, which enabled her to stay in her flat rather than going into care.

We were reminded at Area Meeting that Judy also organised the Christian Aid collection for City Centre Churches, and was involved with Summer School.

Ben Wickens remembers:

Judy is probably one of the Quakers I have spent most time with in Greater Manchester. We worked together with other Quakers including Elizabeth Coleman for several years running part of a night shelter with Boaz Trust. Much of the time I have spent with Judy was at strange hours of the day and night on the meeting house floor. Quite often I had worked all day, gone to college to study or do a voluntary

counselling placement and then would meet her being a friendly, calming, reliable and welcoming presence both for myself, the other volunteers and the refugees too.

When I was organising the rota and struggling to find someone she was there, whenever as LM clerk I needed to know a little about an issue then she was always someone I could speak to. I very much enjoyed all my time with Judy but I also appreciated that she was someone who, if I sent an email asking for help, advice, ideas or whatever else she would always reply and her reply would always be helpful, thoughtful and kind. She cared very much about a lot of people and a lot of causes but it was often in a quiet way that you could easily not notice.

David McHugh remembers:

For me, Judy Holding was 'Hardshaw Estates'. She was the go to person for me and many others in the Manchester and Liverpool area for anything concerning it. Hardshaw Estates. This is a very old Quaker charity with interests in some Meeting Houses and other property in Lancashire, particularly the St Helens area. It generates an income from rents and investments which support Quaker activities in the region. Her knowledge of town planning and the workings of local government were ideally suited to its needs. She was willing to take on many roles while having a full time job as a town planner. She wrote numerous letters and minutes to keep everyone informed and kept many of the elderly trustees involved at a time when all meeting were in person. Her voluminous hand written letters in her distinct cursive script are to be found in the records. She was the trustee that kept Hardshaw Estates running on a steady path. Sometimes I as a trustee, felt overwhelmed by the detail she gave me, but knew I could rely on her to sort things out. She had a prodigious memory and knew many of the along-standing elderly Friends in the Liverpool and Manchester areas through work on Hardshaw Estates. It must have occupied almost all of

her free time, though I doubt she had any because of her other voluntary work. She was also a local volunteer for Lifeshare, encouraging us all to support their work. It was with great sadness that her dementia gradually took away the Judy we knew. She had to give up increasing numbers of her interests after her retirement and then gradually withdrew from active Quaker worship and work, to be cared for by her husband Thomas Saint until she died at home.

Lifeshare people remember:

Judy Holding was a trustee of Lifeshare for 9 years, she was very active with the Christmas projects and helped coordinate these for many years.
Ellen says "I always liked spending time with her because she never judged anyone. Fair, open minded and very sweet. Great listener and so very nice. She led the Christmas project with grace and peace just like you would expect from a Quaker."

Joe Hesketh remembers:

I first met Judy at the Open Christmas in an abandoned school in Ardwick probably 1972. My wife and I went in to do the vegetables for the 120 or so men who stayed in the main hall for about ten days. Judy seemed to be a shift supervisor and would be serving food and drinks for the men, talking to them, giving them fresh clothes. She seemed to have incredible energy.

At Mount Street Wednesday Meeting, when Margaret Bayes decided to stop making the post-Meeting sandwiches after many years, she handed this responsibility over to Judy and myself and I got to know more about Judy's Quaker background - she was from Tewkesbury, where her father was a GP and had had gone as a boarder to The Mount School in York from the age of five.

Elizabeth and Stewart Bailey remember:

We knew of Judy before we came to Quakers. She served on the committee of a night shelter for those who were homeless based in Ardwick, where we volunteered in the 1970's. She was the link, between it and Mount Street. Through her they knew "Quakers were good for a few hundred pounds" when needed. She kept that concern for homelessness before us all as she became involved with Lifeshare when it was founded, particularly with committee, the weekend hot breakfast scheme and the annual Christmas project held in Danzic Street.

Over the years of her faithful attendance and service at Mount Street and her years in town planning and its regulations, she saw, understood and supported the many changes that were made to the building to make it more accessible and sustainable. Her practical knowledge was often invaluable, ranging from knowing how to fire up the old central heating boiler to where all the various fuse boxes were located.

As a skilled needlewoman, Judy's knowledge and expertise were called upon when she organised the meeting's creation of two panels for the Quaker Tapestry. She made many of her own clothes – quite complicated coats, dresses and skirts in natural fabrics.

Some of the best times with Judy were when the meeting was invited to her cottage in Tintwistle, where she provided food, including her 'death by chocolate' desserts and instructions for graded walks around the area.

One way Judy's concern for the environment was shown was in 2005, when she sold this house and her car and moved into the newly opened Green Building on Oxford Road, with all its environmentally friendly features.

Our daughter Nan has very fond memories of Judy taking the children, when she was growing up in the meeting in the early 1980's. She readily took the group and was always available as a substitute, especially in the summer months when others were on holiday. It was then that her knowledge of Manchester's history and geography came into play as she walked them around the city centre. Her talk with them was never patronising, but full of anecdotes and her wry sense of humour.

My 2024 Gratitude Jar

by Bonnie Meekums

At the beginning of 2024, I set up a gratitude jar. It's something I had done for my grandkids in the past, but never for myself. I knew I was in for a challenging year. I had already had one cataract operation, was due for a second, and was also down for a total hip replacement, all in the first two months of the year. I also knew there were things to look forward to, but I was curious about how keeping a gratitude jar might impact on my mental health.

Gratitude is known to have positive effects on health, not limited to mental health but also including cardio-vascular health[i]. It's a wonder it isn't prescribed by all doctors, to be honest. So I knew I would be onto a winner when I set this up.

How did I do it?

1. I got a nice big mayo jar, clean and dry.

2. I put a couple of pens into it and a couple of post-it pads.

3. Whenever I felt moved to do so, I wrote a brief account of something that had happened and made me smile or feel grateful.

4. I wrote on the sticky side, so I could the fold it over and put it into the jar.

5. On New Year's Eve, I took them all out, read them in no particular order, smiled, laughed, and cried.

Here's a flavour of what was in my jar:

· 4.1.24: A beautiful, relaxing yoga session in the dark.

· 6.1.24: Two of my grandsons running excitedly round the National Trust Biddulph Grange Gardens, calling for us to follow them into secret tunnels.

· 7.1.24: A wonderful, gathered Quaker Meeting for Worship in which, as I sat down I felt peace and love surround me and I knew that before I can know what Love requires of me, I must allow that Love to surround me, to love me, to accept and forgive me.

· 8.1.24: Managing to walk six miles locally with my husband, despite my hip pain and reduced fitness – marvelling at the views and enjoying the 3-D definition since my cataract operations, an unexpected aesthetic gift.

· 14.1.24: A wonderful Authentic Movement peer group session. A real sense of connection, and of what the late Mary Fulkerson called 'waiting without expectation.'

· 26.2.24: One week after a total hip replacement, grateful that I set up the Moving Responses DMT peer online support and CPD group four years ago, and that these women bring such warmth and support.

· 14.3.24: My oldest stepson thanked me for loving him as one of my own (being in a stepfamily inspired me to write *A Kind of Family*[ii]). We hugged. We cried together. I told him he's a good man and I am proud of him.

· 16.3.24: Out walking with only my walking poles (crutches left indoors), just under four weeks post-op, feeling the sun on my face and hearing the birds. So grateful for this, and for my husband helping me.

· 4.7.24: Being a part of 'Silverwood,' a community opera based at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, UK. Wonderful people, connecting me with happy memories of musical theatre in my youth.

· 10.7.24: Hugging my daughter, her partner, and their three Kiwi boys for the first time in 19 months. Beyond words.

· 16.7.24: Seeing my three Kiwi grandsons run around the National Trust Quarry Bank Mill grounds.

· 17.7.24: Coming downstairs in the morning to Kiwi boys munching on breakfast. Touching and kissing all three heads and telling them I love them.

· 17.7.24: Seeing my youngest son graduate. Happy tears.

· 18.7.24: Meeting a random lovely woman called Jude and her dog Maggie whilst out walking on the bridleway near home, and ending up discussing neurodivergence.

· 10.8.24: Reading 'The Kuia and the Spider' by Patricia Grace to my twin Kiwi grandsons. Remembering the hero's journey I used to take back in the 1980s from Silsden in West Yorkshire on public transport (bus, train, train or coach) to Manchester so that I could visit Grassroots Bookshop (no longer there) and buy anti-racist, anti-sexist kids' books. This was one of the books I bought, and read to their mother. I had no idea then, that I would later be that kuia, a Māori word for a grandmother, after my daughter had relocated to Aotearoa/New Zealand.

· 11.8.24: A wonderful 'inner peace' treatment with the owner of a local health and healing centre.

· 14.9.24: A moment of peace, lying on the grass at the top of the path to a hill near home. The sun was shining and it felt good to be alive.

· 28.11.24: A visit to Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, to hear live music. Tears in my eyes during the second movement of Beethoven's 7th symphony, so painfully beautiful. Feeling blessed.

· 30.12.24: So blessed to be in a step-family. A lovely day out with my youngest stepson and his two boys, plus my husband, at yet another National Trust property – this time, Fountains Abbey in North Yorkshire. A day full of laughter.

You might wonder why I have bared my soul by sharing most of what was in my jar. Well, here's why:

1. I want to pass on the practice. Do let me know if you start one for 2025. I intend to keep going.

2. Looking back at the above list (and doing a quick thematic analysis), I notice my list has to do with:

a) connection to family (including stepfamily);

b) being outdoors in nature, being in Meeting for Worship, having deep healing treatments, or listening to live music, and the sense of connection to something far greater than myself that those activities bring;

c) being open to connecting with others, whether in the community choir or complete strangers;

d) and professional connections that feed me (I did not include here my monthly Authentic Movement exchange with my colleague Connor Kelly, but it definitely falls into this category).

When I consider this list, I can see that what I am most grateful for, and wish to focus even more on for 2025, is **connection.** This is no great surprise. As Johann Hari[iii] points out, connection is vital to our mental health, and we have known the power of social connection for years[iv].

But my (albeit N=1) list doesn't just include social connection. If you look particularly at 2b above, we are talking about spiritual connection – connection to something perceived as greater than the sum of its parts, transcending ordinary, everyday sense-driven experience.

This fascinates me. So, I guess what I am saying to you, dear reader, is don't neglect your social connections, but also don't neglect your spirituality. You don't have to believe in a god to know that we are but dots in time and space, yet there is something eternal that is accessible to each and every one of us.

How do you take care of your connection with others, and to your spiritual life? What might you do in 2025, to increase that? Do let me know in the comments.

THE FEMININE IN CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM
by Elizabeth Coleman

Both Judaism and Christianity are weak at including the female. Judaism has one male God, addressed as King and Father. Christianity has a trinity of Father, Son, and a male Holy Spirit. But there are some places where the female is more central.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS FEMALE

As well as the gospels which are known to us, there was a gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, used by Jewish Christians, which the church fathers had access to, and has now been lost. However, in their writings, the church fathers include a number of quotations from the Hebrew gospel as they note how they differ from the gospels with which they were familiar. Those from whom I quote, Origen and Jerome, were particularly interested in translations of the Bible, and the texts in different languages.

Origen (c185-c253) quotes from the Hebrew Gospel:

"My mother the Holy Spirit just took me up by one of the hairs of my head and brought me to the great hill, the Thabor."
Hom. in Jer. XV 4

This was problematic to the church, as the church took the Holy Spirit to be male, so could not be a "mother", though the word "spirit" (pneuma) is neuter in Greek. (However the word "parakletos" (advocate) is also used for the Spirit in John's Gospel, and it is male.)

Jerome (c345-420) read the Hebrew Gospel in the library at Caesarea, and translated it into Greek and Latin. He wrote:

In the Gospel according to the Hebrews that the Nazarenes (Jewish Christians) read, the Lord says, "Just now my mother, the Holy Spirit, took me". Now no one should be offended by this, because "spirit" in Hebrew is feminine, while in our language (Latin) it is masculine and in Greek it is

neuter. In divinity, however, there is no gender.
Commentary on Isaiah 49, 9

Jesus spoke of God as Father, but, as “spirit” is female in both Aramaic and Hebrew, he would presumably have thought of the Spirit as female.

HEBREW GOD AND GODDESS?

On the island of Elephantine, near Aswan on the Nile, a large number of Jewish papyrus documents and ostraca (pieces of pottery with writing on) in Aramaic were found, dating from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Many of these are now at Cambridge University. There was a Jewish garrison at Elephantine, defending the southern border of Egypt. I became interested in these writings because in modern Judaism a woman cannot divorce her husband, but I learned that documents from Elephantine made it clear that women there could divorce their husbands. However, it is also of interest that the papyri describe the Jews as worshipping Anat-Yahu. Anat-Yahu is described as either the wife of Yahweh or an aspect of Yahweh.

IT WOULD BE SO MUCH EASIER IF WE ALL SPOKE ARMENIAN!

In certain languages, such as Armenian, no grammatical gender exists and a single pronoun covers both 'he' and 'she'. Revisers of modern liturgies and biblical translations will lament that the English language does not have this simple solution to the problem of 'sexist language'.

https://womenpriests.org/theology/brock-the-holy-spirit-as-feminine-in-early-syriac-literature

POEM ABOUT PALESTINE

Linda Burgum submitted the following poem for the newsletter. She commented: 'I wanted to share this powerful poem by a very courageous young woman.'

WARNING – You may find this poem shocking and upsetting.

As I am the sole editor of the newsletter, I check with AM Clerks if I am unsure whether to publish something, and I was unsure about this poem. They felt it was OK to publish it, but said I should give a note warning of its language, mentioning that Zoe is not a Quaker and that we are conscious of other sensitivities and perspectives on this dreadful carnage in Gaza. However it is a graphic reminder of how gruesome war actually is. It is a controversial subject, but the Newsletter sometimes reflects opinion on such subjects with the aim of opening up dialogue

Linda added:
I also wanted to draw attention to the fact that she had been so deeply moved by the fate of the people in Gaza that she was prepared to serve a prison sentence. And I am not proud to admit that I would not have the courage myself to do such a thing.


When they ask why I did it
I tell them about the children
how their childhood is stolen from them
how their skeletons are left charred and smoking
how easily their bodies are crushed by falling buildings
how their skin melts as their flaming tents collapse around them
I tell them of the boy
found carrying his brothers body
inside his bloody backpack
I tell them of the girl
whose hanging corpse ended at the knees
I tell them of the father
holding up his headless toddler
I tell them of the mother
who received the approximate weight
of her family in body parts to bury
as they had all been shattered
beyond recognition
Then I tell them about the history
how this has happened time and time again
I tell them about the Stern Gang
the Hilltop Youth
the wars of 48 & 67'
Operation Cast Lead & Protective Edge
I explain how they call it mowing the lawn
'cleaning' the land of these 'human animals'
How they calculate the minimum nutrients
to keep everyone alive
chop a bit off and let only that inside
How since the war they've banned
chlorine morphine and childrens toys
and much more that's needed
for people to survive
Finally I talk about
how it was, us that started it
with our Balfour Declaration
and media suppression
and I say I cannot stand for this
it can go on no longer
so I took action against Elbit
their weapons supplier
But I never forget to say
That it was love not hate that called me
Watching their songs and dances for freedom
Reading their hope-filled books
Listening to their dreams
Of being doctors teachers journalists
And never giving up
Zoe Rogers
HMP Bronzefield
NOBODY IS FREE UNTIL EVERYBODY IS FREE
DIRECT ACTION WORKS. GET INVOLVED. SHUT ELBIT DOWN

Poem by a Palestinian prisoner submitted by Priscilla Alderson

At night I dream of a love so wide and so deep it frees us all.

I write to you in my state of love and grief.

At night I dream of a love so wide and so deep it frees us all.

It stretches across continents to fill the space between my brown body and yours.

I wish the love I dream of, was enough.

I wish the love I dream of would hold your grief the same way that our silence hold violence.

When there is nothing else to write about, I write about love.

Because there is no life with living, no strength, worth perception if not for love.

The kind of love that forces you to witness.

The kind of love that aches and expands across seas and cities.

The kind of love that does not stay silent

Love that is not patient or kind, but relentless and harsh.

I dream of love so encompassing it hurts.

I love that does not make us less afraid.

But I love that makes us less compromising.

At night I dream of a love so wide and so deep it frees us all.

When dawn breaks. I dream of waking up to a love that is not new, but old and ancient and unforgiving.

The type of love that stands to action. There is no greater act of love than standing uncompromising between all which you know and (that destroys) at all which could be (rebuilt anew).

Ray Rajwani

Priscilla is a London Quaker who ran a session on child workers for Conflict Minerals Campaign, and receives the newsletter.

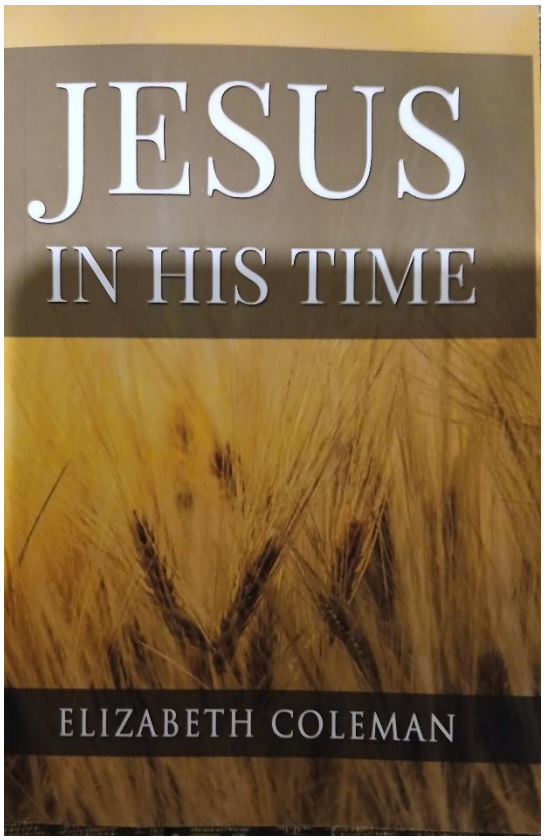
***

BRITAIN YEARLY MEETING

Yearly Meeting is from 23 to 26 May at Friends House, London and online. You can already register by going to www.quaker.org.uk

I'VE SELF-PUBLISHED MY FIRST BOOK

by Elizabeth Coleman



THE BOOK

What would it have been like to be a disciple of Jesus? Or to hear him preach? Or to be a member of his family – his mother or his sister? I am not talking about the Jesus of the church, an idea that came into being after the theological developments of later centuries, God incarnate, part of the Trinity, who died for our sins. I am talking about the prophet of the Kingdom of God, who expected its imminent arrival, and who was also a great preacher, poet, healer and ethical teacher. The book consists of quite short chapters seeing Jesus from the point of view of those who knew him. Much of it is imaginary, but I hope that people

reading this book will feel closer to the real, living Jesus of Nazareth than by looking backwards through the lens of church teaching.

MY INTEREST IN THE HISTORICAL JESUS

I became interested in the historical Jesus when I became aware of how much his whole way of thinking was bound up with the Judaism of his time, with its expectation of the imminent end of the present world order, when God would intervene to establish peace and justice. This led me to study Judaism, initially at an evening class, then studying for an MA in Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College, London (UCL.) A book I found particularly inspiring was "Revolution in Judaea" by Hyam Maccoby, who was able to help me to enter imaginatively into the mindset of Jesus and his followers, so that I could see how his belief in the coming end of the world was inspiring to those first-century Palestinian Jews who heard him, rather than just mad and peculiar. I see myself as a follower of Jesus because of his ethical teaching, though he was wrong about what formed the heart of his message – that the Kingdom of God was coming very soon.

SELF-PUBLISHING

While writing the book was a pleasure, the process of self-publishing was something of a nightmare. Fortunately, I was given advice and encouragement by people who had self-published before.

I was advised to pay someone to format the book. I would need 4 documents – the paperback book, the cover for the paperback book, the Kindle book, the cover for the paperback book. I used the website www.fiverr.com to find someone to do the formatting for me. The first one was in Bangla Desh. He did a good job, and I was in the process of asking for minor changes to his draft, when Fiverr informed me that they were no longer working with him as he had broken their rules. I

found someone else, this time from Pakistan. I was given the choice of starting from scratch, or building on the work already done, and decided on the former. I'm not sure if it was a right decision or not. I gave the man from Bangla Desh some money in recognition of the work he had done.

The formatter from Pakistan also did a good job. I awarded him 4 (very good) out of 5 (excellent) points. He came back to me, saying that this would cause him problems. People use points awarded when choosing which formatters to use. I responded that, while his work was very good, there were one or two problems. I told the main person advising me on self-publishing, and she said that people often award "Excellent" if they are happy with the formatting. I decided I should change the scores from 4 (Very Good) to 5 (Excellent,) but by then it was too late.

I then went into Amazon and filled in their long form and downloaded the 4 documents, and the book was created. (I was directed to Youtube videos which gave guidance on filling in the form.) I was allowed to order up to 5 proof copies, which I did. A few days later I was told that they had been delivered into my letter box. The problem was, they hadn't. On its website, Amazon asked me to look everywhere, including in the bins, and ask neighbours. I did what I could, and did not find them. I went to "chat" on Amazon, and they agreed to refund the cost, which they did on 11 December 2024.

I still had not seen a hard copy of the book, so I ordered one copy. This time there was an exorbitant cost for "shipping." I went to "chat" on Amazon, and they gave a reduced figure which seemed reasonable. I said I didn't mind paying an exorbitant amount for one book, but any subsequent books ordered by me or others should be at the lower rate.

I then ordered a further 4 copies. Unfortunately, Amazon added this order to my order of 1 copy, and this delayed the delivery by a few days.

On 5 January 2025, a neighbour came and delivered the proof copies, which I assume were delivered to her house in December. If I had been able to see the proofs before they were finalised, I would have made a couple of small amendments – putting the title and author on the spine of the book, and putting spaces between the different stories in the chapter on "Three Villages." But in general I was very happy with the book.

I still have more to learn – eg if it's simple to order a copy for a friend in America, and what the shipping cost for that will be. I don't understand why the book is priced in dollars rather than pounds. I rather regret publishing a Kindle version of the book at this stage, as I don't use Kindle myself, and was not able easily to look at the draft. But I set that aside for the time being – it's the paperback copy that interests me.

On 7 January, the other 5 copies I had ordered arrived. At present, I am giving away copies to friends and family, and one to the library of each of our 5 Local Meetings. I know that many people are trying to de-clutter, so I advise them to pass the book on to a friend or their Meeting House library when they've finished with it. I hope I might get the book reviewed in The Friend. My adviser friend says that 20% of the work is getting the book written and published, and 80% of the work is publicity. So that will be my main work now.

It wasn't easy, but still I think I would advise self-publishing if you have written something that you would like others to read. I would be happy to share my limited experience.

Two Quaker authors in conversation

Bonnie Meekums and Georgina Wright

BONNIE: I was excited to meet you through the Quaker Arts Network (QAN). I sensed your Quaker voice throughout your book, *Navaselva, The Call of the Wild Valley*. What prompted you to write it?

GEORGINA: The importance of worship sharing influenced me - sharing stories, listening to other viewpoints, and the life force that connects and supports us all. I was also thinking of United Nations assemblies coming together to share and solve problems. It was an imaginative leap to present the lives and concerns of biodiverse species and give a framework for the actions of the main characters, both human and animal. The Meeting of the Many is a community of wild animals and plants that share their stories, finding connections and ways to adapt and survive.

BONNIE: That's interesting. The key Quaker theme within my novel, *A Kind of Family*, is Equality. I didn't intentionally write a Quaker novel, but we write what we know and are passionate about, don't we? It's set in 2014, when same-sex marriage became legal in the UK.

I also have a flawed Quaker character in my novel. His heart's in the right place, but he drives a gas guzzler and drinks more alcohol than he should (I adopted an alcohol-free lifestyle in 2017).

GEORGINA: I love the character Aggie in your book, an older woman. At first, she seems to be a voice inside Rachel's head, perhaps a ghost or maybe a Quaker Elder with attitude! How did you create her?

BONNIE: Aggie simply appeared. I named her after a late aunt who was what, in the working-class community in which I grew up, was called

‘salt of the earth.’ She could be a version of the guidance I seek in moments of silence. She talks sense!

I wonder if any of what you wrote surprised you? Did your Quaker faith influence your writing without you intending it?

GEORGINA: The story of the animals almost wrote itself. It seemed gifted to me. The idea of the roots of the trees in southern Europe losing their connection with the northern forests was part of my writing before I read the science of a wood wide web. Another surprise was when I found recent research that showed animal communication is more sophisticated than previously thought.

Within the human narration, I wanted to show how wars cast long shadows, whereas the animal perspectives and meetings in my novel provide an example of interspecies cooperation and coexistence - which humans struggle with, resulting in harm.

In what ways is your inclusion of Māori culture important? It seems to reflect a Quaker value of deep connection with each other and the earth.

BONNIE: My daughter and her family live in Aotearoa/New Zealand (ANZ). My grandchildren's school acknowledges me as part of their whānau (pronounced Fah-noh), which broadly translates as the extended family and includes 'found' family, a concept I wanted to explore in my book.

New Zealanders (not just Māori people) also have a deep connection to the earth. If you ask a Māori person where they're from, they might tell you their mountain, or their river – their whenua (land). If we in the UK had more awareness of our whenua, I wonder if we would treat it as we do.

Bonnie Meekums is a member of Manchester and Warrington Area Meeting. Her debut novel, *A Kind of Family*, is available here:

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CZHZKY1Q

Georgina Wright is a member of East Cheshire Area Meeting. Her debut novel, *Navaselva, The Call of the Wild Valley*, is available here:

https://www.thebridgetowncafebooksshop.co.uk/2023/11/navaselva-call-of-wild-valley-by.html?m=1

***

BUILDING TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WORKSHOP

Unfortunately Adam Scott, who had agreed to run this workshop, will be on sick leave for the forseeable future, so the workshop scheduled for November 2024 had to be cancelled. However, he has worked with a training organization called Place for Hope https://www.placeforhope.org.uk
They have agreed to run a workshop for us on "Building Transformative Relationships." The date is yet to be fixed.

THOUGHTS ON PRAYER by HENRI JM NOUWEN

It involves the determination to listen carefully to people and events so as to discern the movements of the Spirit. … it involves the decision to set side time every day to be alone with God and listen to the Spirit.

From Henri JM Nouwen – Circles of Love

THE PRODIGAL SON

Jesus was a great teacher and story-teller, and some of his stories have come to us in summarised form, and we can miss the main message. Henri JM Nouwen, in his book "You are the Beloved", has shown what Jesus would have made clear to his audience – the message of the story of the Prodigal Son.

"God needs me as much as I need God. God is not the patriarch who stays at home, doesn't move, and expects his children to come to him, apologise for their aberrant behaviour, beg for forgiveness, and promise to do better. To the contrary, he leaves the house, ignoring his dignity by running towards them, pays no heed to apologies and promises of change, and brings them to the table richly prepared for them."

NEW DEVELOPMENT WORKER FOR THE NORTH-WEST

The new Local Development Worker in the North-West of England will be Alison Tarpey-Black.

Alison has been working as the Local Development Worker for area meetings in Cumberland, Northumbria, Teesdale & Cleveland, and Wensleydale &Swaledale for the last two years, so she comes with experience of the role. Alison and her family (and her parents!) live in Lancashire and she has lived and worked across North-West England for most of her working life. She is looking forward to working with Quaker communities closer to home.

Alison is replacing Wendy Hampton, who will shortly start a new role with Woodbrooke Learning.

TRUMP AS PRESIDENT

We are all reeling from the huge and sudden changes being made, and the future looks very different from what it did only a few months ago. By the time you receive this newsletter, perhaps Rex Ambler's session on "Living in Dark Times" will have helped us to see a way forward. See page 44

David Gee

by Sandra Dutson

At the last NFPB (Northern Friends Peace Board) meeting several people spoke of David Gee who died at the age of 53 years last December. . . Philip Austin explains that David worked, over the years, for QCEA (Quaker Council for European Affairs) in Brussels, and on peace and disarmament issues for QPSW during the 2000's. He attended Quaker Meetings and has remained very close to Friends, but never saw himself as a Quaker. He did, however, do a number of additional bits of work for Quakers (the peace education 'Peace at the Heart' report in particular) as well as a for a range of other peace organisations. Philip thinks his book 'Holding faith: Creating peace in a violent world' is a must-read My own interest in him was following reading another book he wrote 'Spectacle, reality, resistance'. It is very coherently argued, telling the truths of the realities of war and exposing some of the ways which perpetuate the assumptions 'our security depends on military force rather than structural justice and an ecology of mutual relationships. I am currently re reading it.

Below are parts of an interview David Gee gave to the Church Times in 2021 and which was reproduced in the January 24th 2025 edition following his death. Philip Austin shared the whole article at the NFPB meeting and it can be found at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/10-september/features/interviews/interview-david-gee-writer-and-activist

'I remember seeing CND posters of mushroom clouds when I was about seven, which made me afraid the whole world could just come to an end, just because someone pressed a button. I mean, why would someone do that? It gave me a sense of the fragility of life, and the need to care for it, though I was too young to know how.

I've been involved in the peace movement for 20 years, writing about peace education, global security, and other issues. Some of my work on peace and children's rights is paid for. It's enough to get by, as I live on a budget boat, moving around Oxford. I don't have many bills. If I lived more conventionally, I couldn't do most of the stuff I do.

It's a beautiful life. I feel fortunate every day — though I can see it's quite an odd life: kind of improvised, with bum notes to prove it.

I've given most time to the global campaign to end the military use of children. But it's important to situate these single issues in an overarching vision of *shalom* or *salaam*, which widens the meaning of peace to something like the integrity of relationships or the dignity of our common being. There's room for everyone to be involved, according to our own passions and interests.

There's no place for the military use of children anywhere, including here. It's time we moved on from training 16-year-olds to impale a body on a bayonet and calling that "an opportunity" — especially when a third of recruits drop out of the Army within a few months, and find that they've lost educational opportunities. It's a high-risk strategy for their economic future, and the evidence in favour of raising the enlistment age to 18 is pretty overwhelming. See the Child Rights International Network website

I **was listening to activists talk about their exhaustion in terms of hopelessness.** "I don't see what the point is any more. . ." So I wrote *Hope's Work* to encourage them and others to keep hold on hope. I'm wary of optimism: I've tried to describe a kind of difficult hope which doesn't hang its value on the expectation that everything will turn out OK, because it might not.

I began my book with the *Enuma Elish* [the Babylonian creation myth] because it's as close as we get to a kind of foundational myth of Western civilisation, and because its norms of violence are where we're starting from when wondering about hope. It set the tone with its story of a man-god who proudly slays the feared

mother-dragon to impose order in the name of peace, but actually primes history for violence. Although I use words and phrases from the original text, I tell it from the imagined point of view of a dissident in Babylon. Dissenters remember origin myths in their own ways, which, of course, are never formally recorded, but are passed on in stories.

I end with the Emmaus story, because it's fascinating for what it leaves out and invites the reader to imagine. What are those two disciples actually saying to each other on their long walk out of Jerusalem, as their hearts burn? I imagine they're talking about the defeat of the hope they'd placed in their friend and Messiah, now dead. But as they walk they find hope in each other, as friends among those who gathered around Jesus. Finally, after their epiphany, they know their only true road is back into Jerusalem, and that the spirit of their friend will always be with them. It's a story for us today.

Most of us can relate to the predicament of feeling disturbed by tragedy in the world around us, feeling an impulse to respond, but also feeling powerless, and so want, instead, to protect ourselves from it all. The world is a place where tragedy happens — and it's hard to witness it, even at a distance, without feeling overwhelmed. And political power is indeed concentrated in the hands of a few people; so where does that leave us?

But creation is also a place of promise. Life here still deserves to be loved, and there are many ways to do that, and not only through activism. Hope is also the choice to treat life as if it matters, in the present, without knowing the future'.

Bolton Meeting Talks and Thoughts on Tuesdays

7.30 pm – 9.00 pm via Zoom

Programme for February- April 2025

4th Feb.	Using the technology Bring along something to share. Practise using the Zoom share function with pictures and sound.
11th Feb	Bring and share Telling the stories of saints
18th Feb	Gordon Benson Is the Eco Church award the right path to sustainability for you and your meeting?
25th Feb	Bernie Jordan Food and farming – the view from Cliffs Farm in Lancashire
4th March	Wendy Pattinson Measured time- how accuracy changed the world Inspired by the book 'Saving Time' by Jenny Odell
11th March	Catherine de Neergaard "Rex Ambler's Experiments with Light. Introduction, Guided Meditation, and Discussion."
18th March	Rabbi Warren Elf On Judaism
25th March	Bob Pickup James Naylor and George Fox. Was there an early Quaker schism?
1st April	Keith Whittaker The 'foolishness' of Christianity for April 1st
8th April	Planning session A time to review previous talks and plan the next programme
15th April	Wendy Pattinson Discussion based on the book 'Climate Change and the Nation State: the realist case' by Anatol Lieven
22nd April	Catherine de Neergaard A talk based on the book by Timothy Snyder "On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century"
29th April	Philip Austin Taking action for peace where we are.

Talks and Thoughts is all about friendly discussion, in-depth conversation, or just listening.

EVERYONE WELCOME

For more information and to confirm the subject for the evening, please contact Bernie on clerksboltonquakers@gmail.com

Creative Thinking for Quakers
NickTyldesley Citizen of Bolton

The Philosophy for Schools Movement founded some 30 years ago is based on the belief that even young primary pupils can engage with sophisticated questions around ethical issues. This follows in the tradition of the Socratic Dialogue. The process can enhance discussion skills, a sense of curiosity, a respect for alternative views and teaching an acceptance that there may well be no right answers. It should be a fun activity too. “The Little Book of Thunks- 260 questions to make your brain go ouch” by Ian Lister is an offshoot that provides a range of stimulus questions which can in fact by enquirers of all ages.

A “Thunk” is defined as something that makes your brain go ouch- taking you out of your comfort zone and making you come up with unexpected, richer answers to share with others. The context for posing thunks is a friendly circle where a group can listen respectfully, choose to make a contribution and let the discussion in whatever direction seems appropriate at the time. The topic will finish by mutual consent. Yes, this process does work- I have successfully used thinks with teachers in India [used to a very teacher -directed pedagogy] and very bright but disruptive Y10 pupils.. No technical expertise is needed to get started and the atmosphere should be friendly and laced with a sense of humour. There is no necessity for a designated group leader.

To give you a flavour of thunks from Lister's book here a few examples for consideration and a worked example to show how a discussion might progress:

14] Which is more important- being right or nice?
66] Is a computer clever?
136] Howe many bricks is a wall?

181] Can you stop thinking?
205] Which is more real: a table,love, air or fire?
245] If I deliberately spill a bucket of paint on a canvas- is that art|? If I do exactly the same think and it was an accident and get the same results- is it art too?

Example: “Do Dogs Like Poetry?”

simple response- of course not, don't be silly . But start by considering how you might train your dog to listen to poetry at a regular time slot, add the odd treat, just read a short poem, stroke the dog, try different poems-length and rhythm and expression. Write your own poem for a dog. Does your dog react- and this raises the issue of conditioning- is the response due to the tone of voice /words. How might a wild dog react\? The you might divert to discuss why do we like poetry in general, the purpose of poems. A general conclusion – would you dog respond with a wagged tail?

So perhaps we could try some thinks that might appeal to a Quaker audience to stimulate discussion in a meeting, to encourage a climate of creative ideas but without the pressure of coming to a consensus. Here are some to get you going but of course, design your own too:

1] How would you recognise a Quaker in the street?
2] Where do thoughts come from?
3] Should we build more houses or rebuild Notre Dame?
4] What colour is heaven?
5] Can a dog become a Quaker?
6] What makes God smile?
7]] Is the Bible a dangerous book?
8] What questions would you want to ask George Fox?
9] What would happen if we all agreed with each other all the time?
10] Is AI generated ministry proper ministry?

11] Should Quakers be proud the wear broad-brimmed hats / bonnets again?
12] Can you still have a war with no fighting?

Enjoy?

AREA MEETING DATES

There is no Area Meeting in February

1 March – Special AM to consider response to World Plenary

A Special Area Meeting will be held on Saturday 1st March 2025 at Central Manchester Meeting House between 10.30am & 1pm to consider our response to discernment at The World Plenary held in South Africa in August 2024. (See page 42)

29 March – Area Meeting

Saturday March 29th - 2pm at Central Manchester and online (hybrid)

AREA MEETING BURIAL GROUND, SALE

Hamamelis (Witch Hazel) end Jan 2025

Snowdrops

Honesty


Quaker Meeting House

Quaker Quest, April 2025.

Thank you for sharing the information below with new attenders.

Nataly

MAPPING EXERCISE CONTINUED

by Sandra Dutson

Many of you took part in the Mapping exercise conducted by the Environment Group early last year. This was a follow up to the Living Witness weekend held in August 2022 and attended on behalf of the Area by three of us.

The minute of the Living Witness weekend included these words; 'the universe is participatory, there are no bystanders'. The Mapping exercise was an attempt to provide an informative and inspiring picture of the environmental concerns and actions of individuals and groups cross our Area. A huge amount of information was collected. How to use this information is still being developed by the Environment group.

Last year three of the main themes to emerge were picked up for further consideration. These were Food, transport and energy use. Articles were written for the Newsletter. Discussions were encouraged at Area and Local Level. There was encouragement to write travel diaries. How to support people minimise energy use is the theme under consideration at present. Much of this has been about individual lifestyle choices. These are important as if enough people care enough to educate themselves and change patterns of behaviour this can encourage the bigger organisations and political institutions to make the large scale changes needed to prevent further climate breakdown and to minimise diversity loss.

With change of government we felt the time was right to shift our focus now on campaigning activities though we hope at LM level people will

still encourage each other in those lifestyle changes we can make. The discussions made it clear we all
have different needs and in some case problems that mean individual actions are more limited. Sometimes focus on lifestyle can make us susceptible to ‘greenwashing’ and companies have been known to foster the need for individual responsibility without acknowledging their much greater responsibility. In part the move to campaigning seems really important at present. Our new government may seem to offer more scope for letter writing whether to MPs or Ministers but recently it is clear this may be even more vital as there has been a certain amount of back tracking on previous commitments and the withdrawal by President Trump from the Paris agreement is deeply disturbing and likely to influence other countries.

We are planning to a visit to a church engaged in the Ecochurch programme and the Solar wind farm owned by Greater Manchester Waste Authority.

We see all this work in the wider context of the Canterbury declaration and it is all intended to keep environmental concerns on the agendas of all of us as we continue to discern the roles of LM and Area meetings in addressing the climate and nature emergencies.

Manchester & Warrington Area Meeting
Special Area Meeting, Saturday 1st March 10.00 to 13.30.

Reflections on the World Plenary Theme
Living the Spirit of Ubuntu:
Responding with Hope to God's Call to Cherish Creation and One Another.
(Ubuntu is a Zulu word that speaks to the power of the *Spirit* between us, enabling us to go beyond our individual selves and grasp that 'I am because we are').

Date: Saturday 1st March 2025 **Venue:** Central Manchester Meeting House

10.00 Arrival & Refreshment

10.30 – 13.30 Special Area Meeting for Worship for Church Affairs.

13.35 Opportunity to talk - Bring Our Own Lunch, Drinks provided.

The Meeting will be hybrid and the invitation to has been shared with Friends outside M&WAM.

Zoom Link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83120291772?pwd=9tEblud2TKAaeV2mVHbbTS3V8OakN6.1
Meeting ID: 831 2029 1772
Passcode: 010325

Everyone is warmly invited to this special Area Meeting session, taking place online and in person on 1 March, where we will be considering the theme of the world plenary: *Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with Hope to God's Call to Cherish Creation and One Another*. The day will be introduced briefly by Tim Gee (the general secretary of FWCC) who will remind us of the need for brave, sensitive and complex conversations together if we are to truly change and start to heal - both ourselves and the world around

us. We will hear a little about the work of the four witness groups of our area meeting (peace promotion, social justice, the environment, and racial justice). The main part of the day will focus on exploring together how we might be led by the spirit and discerning what our next steps could be as a Quaker community.

PREPARATION

Individual Quakers, Local Meetings, Witness Groups and other Quaker gatherings may wish to use the following queries to help prepare for the special AM:

a. To what extent are you, or we, 'living the spirit of Ubuntu' in our life?

a. In what ways do you, or we, do this? How might we support each other?

a. Where might the promptings of the spirit (stemming from our Quaker Testimonies) lead us?

The Quaker Faith Space group at Central Manchester Meeting will be using similar queries in their exploration of *living the spirit of Ubuntu* after meeting for worship on 16 February and you are welcome to attend this worship sharing session.

Other resources that may be helpful:

- The tapestry document from the World Plenary Meeting
- Recorded ministry on the themes of Ubuntu, Care of Creation and the Healing and Repair of Relationships in the Light of Historic and Current Injustice.

On behalf of the Special AM Planning Group:

Antony Froggett antonyfroggett@gmail.com
Margaret Calvert margaretcalvert@hotmail.com

President Trump. First responses

by Sandra Dutson

Like many I am appalled and made anxious by the statements, and actions of President Trump's first days in office. There is also a sense of disbelief at what has happened, both in terms of what it says about those who voted for him and beginning to see what it will mean for a whole variety of groups and individuals in America and worldwide. Elizabeth wrote to some of us saying: 'We are all reeling from the huge and sudden changes being made, and the future looks very different from what it did only a few months ago' That is how I feel and yet also feel the need to begin some sort of expression of my deepest concerns. Of the many statements he has made or changes he has made or intends to make these 4 are the most disturbing to me.

- The statements re Israel/Palestine.
- The withdrawal of American funding for the World Health Organisation.
- The withdrawal from the Paris Climate agreement.
- The treatment of 'illegal' immigrants'.

Like many I was delighted by the Ceasefire and release of hostages and those Palestinians held in prison. We are not in a position to say I think how much the involvement of President Trump played in this. My concern right from the beginning was what he might have promised Netanyahu re the West Bank. In his first term of office he chose to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem. This time he quickly lifted sanctions on West Bank settlers and groups. This has emboldened increased and extreme violence by some settlers. . His statements about 'cleaning Gaza out' are meeting resistance both by Palestinians, leaders of countries he thinks should take n Palestinians and international communities because this would clearly further genocidal

intent. He has now sent very large bombs to Israel, originally promised by Joe Biden. When asked ‘why’ he said ‘because they have paid for them’. This considerably reduces in my view all hopes that the cease fire will result in further negotiations for a lasting solution. It is also shows the value placed on money in transactions whatever other outcomes might be.

The withdrawal of funding from the WHO is disturbing because at a time when all our major crises have a global dimension there is a need to make international institutions stronger and more effective and his stance will bolster the views of those who are dismissive of them, including Netanyahu.

The third concern, in many ways the most serious is the withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement. This is a form of climate change denial. It is associated with some very scornful and violent language, ‘drill, baby drill’. And also allows those of similar mind to express and act on those sentiments, including our own government.

His treatment of ‘illegal’ immigrants was always going to be of concern but seems even more extreme than feared with threats of Guantanamo. The language used eg ‘aliens’ is uttered in totally scornful, dehumanising tones.

Even since starting to put these thoughts to paper more outrageous statements and actions have followed. Whilst it is clear he has now immense power, backed by those with immense wealth and influence it is not totally clear how much of what is said will come to pass. There is resistance within America and internationally.

What are we to do? It is hard for many of us even to listen to him but we need to do so to increase our own power of vigilant critique. We need more than ever to expose a use of language that is so lacking in

compassion and often downright brutally violent. We also need to be aware of how his stance on so many concerns is emboldening other governments to join this onslaught on all the thinking and actions that make for a more just and peaceful world and decide on our own resistance.

***

***Staying warm and cutting bills and emissions*:**

Home Energy Checklist

by Ged Edwards

The research shows that we produce about a sixth of all carbon emissions in running our homes. This includes heating (gas, oil and coal) and running our household appliances. While renewable energy is providing increasing amounts of carbon-free electricity, we still need gas power stations to provide a "baseload" when the sun doesn't shine or there isn't enough wind to turn the turbines. At the same time, while we can wrap up warm and keep the heating down, we need to stay healthy and comfortable as well as being able to pay for it. It can be difficult to know what we can do to improve the situation.

To help us find out how we could improve our houses, the Environment Group has developed a Home Energy checklist, S*taying warm and cutting bills and emissions*. Simple to use, you can check how to improve your house's heating and making it warmer eg through insulation and draught-proofing - and any financial support for it (in some case, quite large, especially for new renewable heating systems like Heat Pumps). There's guidance on reducing costs and emissions by changing energy tariffs, choosing energy efficient appliances when you are changing them, and experience from other friends who have installed some technologies and their top tips! There's great advice too in print from a Friend in Judith Leary-Joyce's great book, *A Beginner's Guide to Eco Renovation* (ISBN 978099 3077234) with loads of practical tips.

Copies of the checklist are available free from Ged Edwards: gededwards@outlook.com.

FUNDRAISING FOR QUAKERS AND OTHERS FORCED TO FLEE M23 REBELS IN EAST CONGO

We were about to launch a fundraising appeal for Quakers and others in Displaced Persons Camps in the Goma area of North Kivu, DRC, when things changed for the worse, as you will have heard in the news. M23 took more land, and it seems that it now controls Goma, where the Quakers supporting those in the surrounding camps live. It has also taken more land in South Kivu, and is threatening Bukavu. Quakers in Bukavu are trying to support many Quaker and non-Quaker newly arrived refugees from the surrounding countryside, and are living in fear.

Conflict Minerals Campaign is working with Quaker Congo Partnership to raise funds to help those in desperate need. It will very shortly be possible to donate via the QCP website www.quakercongo.org.uk
The money will go to CEEACO (Community of the Evangelical Friends' Churches in Congo**),** the Quaker Yearly Meeting in Congo, with which QCP has been working for some years, and they will manage its distribution.

What can we do to help?

1) The Congolese Quakers ask us to pray for them.
2) We can donate via the QCP website
3) The problem is exacerbated by Rwanda, which supports the rebels. We can write to our MPs asking them to ask the government to put pressure on Rwanda to keep out of DRC, by cutting aid, trade sanctions, and any other means.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

If you are not on the mailing list, and would like to be emailed future copies of the Newsletter, (or to stop receiving it,) email Mary Atkinson on admin@manchesterquakers.org.uk with your request.

Please send items for the Newsletter to elizcol@dialstart.net The deadline for newsletters is 5pm on the last day of the month. **The deadline for the March newsletter is 5pm on 28 February.** It can take time for an email to arrive, so I suggest that you aim for 27 February. I put almost everything I receive into the newsletter, with very little editing. Short items with pictures are best. Letters in response to articles in this newsletter are welcome. When submitting items for publication, please be aware that the newsletter is a public document, posted on our website, and we do not control who sees it. Think before submitting personal information, email addresses and photos. Try to avoid sending text and photos that are under copyright, and get consent from people in photos if needed.

Look at the website https://www.manchesterquakers.org.uk under "Newsletters and Events" if you'd like to see back-issues. If you want to make contact with anyone who writes in the newsletter, and no contact details are given, email me elizcol@dialstart.net and I'll forward your email to them.

Elizabeth Coleman, Editor 07969 385080