

south london aqm news

Croydon, Epsom, Purley, Streatham & Sutton local Quaker meetings

February 2011

A golden opportunity to transform violence in Britain

**What turns a man from evil towards goodness?
How to change the violent into peaceable, pro-social citizens?**

Not one of the men who have completed my therapeutic programme has re-offended with a violent offence. 15 years of research carried out by charity WAVE Trust has given me a deep understanding of what creates violence in people. These men are wedded to violence when I start work with them, but once they discover there is truly a choice, they do not wish to live that way. At heart, they want to love and be loved. Part of the healing process is to show them the love they need, while never condoning their deeds. Part is technical – to treat and cure post traumatic stress disorder, brought on by the childhood abuse and neglect so many suffered.

WAVE 's research shows that violence is largely instilled by early life experience – especially the first 3 years. By age 3 the 17% most aggressive children are already 10 times more aggressive than the most peaceful 33%. Why? They have grown up in family environments of anger, aggression, violence, neglect, abuse.

The NSPCC estimates that 2 million children in Britain have suffered severe maltreatment. That is a staggering level of sheer human suffering. It is also the prime engine of violence in our society – which is why WAVE is leading a '70/30' campaign to reduce child maltreatment by 70% by 2030.

Local authorities, whose duty is to protect children, wait until children are severely maltreated and then intervene too little, too late. In Croydon, 2 years ago, 80% of referrals of children possibly being maltreated were not even investigated. This picture is repeated all over Britain.

It does not have to be this way. One local authority is setting up a truly preventive strategy. Families will be screened before babies are born. High quality parenting and other forms of support will be provided to families at risk, to prevent harm before it ever occurs. Systems to achieve this have been thought through – and will save money compared with current reactive approaches.

If this pioneering local authority proves it can make significant reductions in child maltreatment, WAVE is committed to spreading this approach across Britain, transforming childhood and violence. This is a golden opportunity – and Friends can help: make sure the pioneering authority – Croydon – sticks to its plans over the next few years, and does what it has promised. Its CEO is committed to that – but sometimes plans are not followed through. It is vital that this plan is, and is monitored to see if it delivers the hoped-for benefits.

George Hosking, a Clinical Criminologist, is a Member of Croydon Meeting. WAVE Trust's web site is www.wavetrust.org. Telephone 020 8688 3773

*At January area meeting we agreed to reduce area business meetings from nine to six (January, March, May, July, September, November) and to devote the February, July and October meetings to fellowship and inspirational activities. A fixtures card for the rest of 2011 is almost ready to print, but some details have yet to be finalised. **Please note that at time of writing we are uncertain about the date and place of March area meeting.***

Frances Touch, Clerk

A Meeting in South Africa

Kirsty Noble, the daughter of Marian and John Noble (and granddaughter of Arthur and Edna White) is now working with the Foreign Office and is currently on a placement in South Africa. The following extracts from a letter home tell of her first experience of a Quaker Meeting in that country:

As I enter my first Quaker Meeting in South Africa I am handed a book, "Living Adventurously", the lady beside me smiles and says, "We are so very proud of this publication". The chapter headings say a lot about the issues for Quakers in modern day Africa and how the trusty red book, on the coffee table in front of me, has been universally interpreted. I flicked through pages about "Quakers on HIV/AIDS", "The Quakers on Apartheid" and then settled on "Quakers on Ubuntu".

As Desmond Tutu explained: "One of the sayings in our country is *Ubuntu* - the essence of being human. It speaks about our interconnectedness. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world." *Ubuntu* was why I found myself here. It was why sitting here, 10 hours and two time zones from London I felt like I'd just walked into Sutton and sat down. Because wherever you are, in a Meeting, you know you are amongst friends - and that to me was *Ubuntu*.

I moved to South Africa 9 months ago posted here to work at the British High Commission. 9 months of living adventurously. Two weeks ago I decided that I needed, to find some local projects to get involved with. There is much poverty here, yet I live in the nice part of town protected by the highest level of security. While we travel frequently and see incredible parts of the country you don't often meet the locals, and it's their opinion I'm interested in. Deciding to get involved with the local community proved harder than I thought. The first step, I decided, was to find Quakers.

After trying several social networking sites I found an email address for a woman named Janneke in Pretoria. I wrote to her and within half an hour I was preparing for my first Meeting. This morning Janneke met me outside of the compound gates and I followed her in my car through parts of Pretoria that my security manager had

told me in numerous briefings were “no go” areas. But at 8.30am on a Sunday the streets are full of churchgoers, typically members of the Zion church draped in white travelling to informal roadside churches.

It's a short drive to Muckleneuk. There is a delay at the door because, like all houses in Pretoria you have to battle past bars, locks and alarms to answer it. I am warmly invited into the house of Amanda and Jeremy and their 3 young boys. Amanda is from Hampstead Heath and has been a practising Quaker her whole life. I settle down to my hour of silence and reflect on how, after 9 months in the country I have found my way here. There are 6 of us in Meeting.

After 45 minutes the children are brought in and I am reminded of my childhood; spending the last 15 minutes “in with the adults”. After Meeting the six of us sat around drinking tea with homemade brownies and talked about the troubles in Egypt and then about ourselves. Our chat lasted as long as the Meeting had.

News of Friends

Reg Briscoe (Croydon) is still waiting for his hip operation at time of writing, having been “prevented” several times in the past few months.

Jean Apps (Purley) has recently acted in a short video for ActionAid as part of a campaign against biofuels. Jean has an Advanced Acting Diploma (with Distinction) and is a former member of National Institute of Medical Herbalists.

Julie Groves (Purley) has almost completed her training to be a Special Constable with the Metropolitan Police for the Borough of Croydon.

Philip Barron, a former Croydon member, has transferred his membership to East Sussex AM following his move to Bernhard Baron Homes at Polegate, Eastbourne. Never one to take life easy, he is now a co-clerk of Polegate meeting.

Janet Veitch, who was accepted into membership in November last and attends Purley meeting, has been awarded an OBE for her work as a campaigner for women's rights. Here is an extract from the *Croydon Advertiser* of 11 January:

Janet Veitch has been rewarded by the Queen for dedicating her life to helping women's groups have their voices heard by government. Miss Veitch, 55, from Coulsdon, worked as a civil servant before becoming the director of the now-abolished Women's National Commission and a director of the End Violence Against Women Campaign. She said the award was an “honour”, but added she feels there is a long struggle ahead to end violence against women. She told the *Advertiser*: “We want to try to raise awareness about why there is violence against women in the UK in the first place so we can try and stop it before it happens, instead of mopping it up afterwards.” Miss Veitch said she hoped the award would raise awareness for the cause. She added: “I was very surprised. It was quite startling to be fortunate enough to be singled out. I'm delighted the work of ‘violence against women’ is being recognised by being given this honour”. “I feel all the women working in this area are in some way being acknowledged for this important work.”

Quaker Life in South London

Minute of a meeting held at Sutton Meeting House on February 12th 2011

Our Meeting held an exploration into aspects of our Quaker Life together. The theme for the day was “Diversity and Inclusivity in our Area Meeting”.

The Meeting was arranged for Elders and Overseers of the AM with an invitation to anyone who was particularly interested in the subject to join us. Thirty people gathered for what proved to be a most worthwhile time spent together.

In the morning Isobel Lane, Anne Bartholomew and Ryszanda Rogers from Streatham Meeting shared with us difficulties which arise from poor mental health. By confronting our fears through searching question about mental health we deepened our understanding and we will try to take this back into our Meetings for Worship.

In the afternoon Michael Booth and Liz Anderton from Quaker Life Explorations enabled us to consider our attitudes to diversity and inclusivity within our Meetings. We looked at what we can realistically achieve in our individual Meetings in order to become more inclusive in the short, medium and longer term. A wonderful energy of ideas and action followed and we hope this will be reported back to our Meetings and to Area Meeting.

“Our diversity of belief and language presents us with a challenge and an opportunity to transform it from a problem that divides us to a gift that enriches us.”

Susan Northrop, Clerk of AM elders

Facts and figures

At the end of 2010 membership of South London AQM stood at 205 – a loss of two over the year.

We gained seven new members: four by personal application (two visited, two accepted by letter of endorsement), and three by certificates of transfer from other Area Meetings. But nine members were lost - there were four deaths, one resignation, and four transfers to other AQMs. There are no children in membership, and no marriages were recorded in 2010.

Membership numbers for individual meetings were: Croydon 41 (previously 44), Epsom 22 (from 21), Purley 25 (from 23), Streatham 45 (from 44), Sutton 72 (from 75). Women continue to outnumber men by two to one.

Present and prevented

This is the title of a report on membership activity within the area and local meetings of Britain Yearly Meeting as established by means of a biennial survey conducted by Bill Chadkirk and Ben Pink Dandelion. The following information is based on the result of questionnaires sent in April 2010 to all area and local meetings.

This four-year long exercise of three questionnaires has been quite a task. One thousand two hundred and seventy-three questionnaires – along with attached notes, letters and other appendages – have been received and read, and 53,578 separate bits of data have been entered into spreadsheets, so thank you all who took time out of busy schedules and went to the trouble of completing the forms and returning them.

Over the next year the data will be re-analysed in a number of different ways but here are some preliminary

conclusions to agree or disagree with, to discuss or dismiss.

The number of people who do attend Meeting for Worship on any given Sunday is just over a third of those who could. Historically, attendance was a religious duty and missing too many meetings without good excuse would have invited a visit from elders. In the early 21st century is 1/3 good or bad?

The number of 'visitors' – seekers or inquirers – at Meeting for Worship is tiny. Are we doing enough for outreach or is the 'if people want to they will find us' attitude widespread?

The number of children associated with meeting is falling and the number of meetings that hold children's classes is considerably lower than those meetings reporting children on their lists. Why is this? Is it simply that meeting has to compete with a lazy morning in bed, Face-book and 'Call of Duty: Black Ops'? Or is it that meetings do not offer the challenge, interest and fellowship that their young people require?

Participation in Meeting for Worship for Business both at Local and Area Meeting is an even lower fraction of possible members than attendance at Meeting for Worship. Should we be grateful for the numbers who do attend or sorrowful that more, especially attenders, do not?

The number of appointments made by meetings is another measure of involvement in the business of the meeting. They appear to have increased and we appear to be approaching capacity – an appointment for everyone. It used to be said that we needed volunteers because we didn't have a paid ministry, now a number of meetings suggest in attached notes that they try to create an appointment for everyone as a way of involvement. Is it good to do this or are we becoming so busy with worldly affairs that energy is being taken away from Meeting for Worship and spirituality?

Captivating cuisine

On January 12th twelve Epsom Friends dined in style inside Her Majesty's Prison Highdown on the Banstead/Sutton border.

The Clink restaurant, run as a rehabilitation training scheme for inmates, has a welcome veneer of sophistication. This is achieved by subdued lighting, live music (guitar), black Perspex-type tabletops and high backed padded chairs. The service is superb; the waiters are efficient, personable and courteous. An eclectic range of dishes, all clearly priced on the individual menu sheets. My choice: tomato and basil soup, with home-made walnut bread, frittata with salad, crème brûlée with berries and coffee. All for £15. Excellent cuisine and presentation. Pre-booking is essential: a list of directives is sent. Security checks are simple. Hand in identity paper (passport/driving licence). In exchange a neck ribbon with security pass is handed over. Visitors are escorted through locked gates and compounds. Well worth the minor hassle. A perfect venue for anniversary celebrations. Indeed a well-known local celebrity of stage and screen was noted, dining with friends. Cordon-blue dining on your doorstep - do give it a try. I promise you will not be disappointed. Anyone for breakfast ?

Glenys Gadd (an attender at Epsom meeting)

P.S. For those wishing to book a table at The Clink, Frances advises that with the date requested they also name a Friend who has already dined there and include the date when that friend did so. The usual method is to contact by email: admin@thelinkrestaurant.com (and see also www.thelinkonline.com). Alternatively, telephone the restaurant on 020 7147 6524.

Need funding?

Friends and Attenders who have a serious intention of attending Quaker courses, workshops and events such as Yearly Meeting Gathering are reminded that grants are available from the Area Meeting Legacies Fund, intended for those who are unable to meet the full cost from their own resources.

The Legacies Committee is concerned to make the best use of the funds available and has decided to meet up to one third of the total cost in the first instance. Further assistance may be available from Local Meeting funds and there is, in addition, a Yearly Meeting Gathering 2011 Bursary scheme. Early application is recommended.

Application forms should be available from members of the Committee; Helen Drewery (Sutton), Susan Northrop (Epsom) and Reg Briscoe or David Rees (Croydon). In case of difficulty contact the Clerk of Legacies Committee, David Rees, on 020 8656 8352 or (e-mail) direes@blueyonder.co.uk

Singing workshops

The fourth singing workshop was held at Sutton Meeting House on Sunday 7th November at 1pm.

An afternoon of delight, much appreciation goes to Leslie, Antonia and Gay for making it all happen. Friends came from Sutton, Epsom and Croydon, some new, others had been before making us 16 in total. Very quickly the group came together, thanks to the 'warming up' session, pulling faces at each other, lots of smiles, really stretching our facial, neck and chest muscles.

Having been put in groups of high, low and medium voice, singing in rounds became fun and exhilarating. The experience of Always Remember and Peace, both Taizé songs gave a deep feeling of prayer and relaxation. In contrast we had African rhythm, Carol Contant giving us that special beat on her drums, it was also great to hear the male voice input! We even sang in another tongue! 'Mungo yu mwena' (O God is Good).

The afternoon for me, and for others I'm sure, was a great success and I look forward to the next time. The plan I'm told is to have three sessions a year. Seems a great idea. Thank you again to Sutton Friends.

Margie Ashley, Croydon Meeting.

SINGING WORKSHOP IN MARCH

The next singing workshop will be at Sutton Meeting House on Sunday 13 March. The workshop will start an hour later at 2pm and will finish at 4pm with a refreshment break at 3pm. This is to allow time for those who wish to attend their Local Business Meeting to do so and still be able to join us. The aim, as always, is to have fun, no experience of singing is necessary just come along.

Leslie Bell, Gay McDonagh, Antonia Moxham

“Empty spaces”

At the Area Meeting residential weekend in November Harvey Gillman led us in an exploration of what it means for us as Quakers to be part of the mystical tradition in religious experience. Our first exercise was to call out at random what associations the term “mystic(al)” held for us while Harvey wrote them out on a flip-pad. Polly Walker, who attends Streatham Meeting, subsequently composed this poem using all the words that appeared on the sheet:

*There are no paths before us, just 360 degrees of latent paces
But we always talk of paths and roads because we don't like empty spaces
It's like we talk of seconds minutes hours to harness what flies between them
And we speak of Gods semantically attempting to perceive him
(Navigation, find a trig point, find direction)
We turn away from mystery, so unsubstantial otherworldly
There is no evidence for emptiness its immaterial, its subjectivity!
No units, cubits, measuring jugs, or astrolabe with which to see it
Yet how are we to damn this thing when in no doubt we feel it?
No proof is there beyond the fact we live it love it breathe it
God gifted us the Quaker way, the mystic's inner light
But yet still holiness I find in nuclear physics unveiled sight
Then I might gaze in wonder into the darkness of eternity
And know it all to be reflection of the atomic emptiness within me.
How is this then beyond us, how is this otherworldly?
When 99.999 percent of us is mystery?*

Asking and receiving

This anonymous poem, quoted by Mark Tully in “Something Understood”, was edited by Cecily Taylor:

*I asked for knowledge - power to control things;
I was granted understanding,
to learn to love people.
I asked for strength, to be a great person;
I was made weak, to become a better one.
I asked for wealth, to make friends;
I became poor, to keep friends.
I asked for all things, to enjoy life;
I was granted all life, to enjoy things.
I cried for pity;
I was offered sympathy.
I craved for healing of my own disorders;
I received insight into another's suffering.
I prayed to God for safety - to tread the trodden path;
I was granted danger, to lose track and find the Way.
I got nothing that I prayed for;
I am, among all people, richly blessed.*

Easter Sharing

Croydon Friends invite you to an Easter Sharing of words and music on a seasonal theme on Friday 22 April at 2.15 pm at Croydon meeting house.

All are welcome to bring contributions of words, music (CD or audio cassette if not live), or silence if preferred, suitable to the time and season of year. We expect to finish with tea and hot cross buns at about 3.45.

We are pleased to announce that the Quaker Steel Band will be taking part again!

Epsom through the ages

Here is part of the history of Epsom Meeting as written in the records of London & Middlesex General Meeting. I have highlighted the different names used, for interest.

Epsom **Allowed Meeting** was recognised as a constituent meeting of Kingston MM in 1941 (MM min 14 of 18 October 1941). It was altered to a **Particular Meeting** in 1953. its style was changed to Epsom **Recognised Meeting** from 1 Jan 1967, and from 1 January 1969 became a constituent meeting of the newly-formed Purley & Sutton MM. From 1 May 1995 established meetings for worship, authorised by minute of the monthly meeting, and conducting regular meetings for church affairs, like Epsom, were restyled **Preparative Meetings**. Epsom meeting has now changed name twice more. In October 2007 Epsom **Preparative Meeting** became **Epsom Local meeting** and subsequently **Epsom Quaker meeting**. In September 2007 Purley & Sutton MM became Purley & Sutton AM and then in January 2009 was renamed South London Area Meeting.
Frances Touch (Clerk, Epsom LQM)

The God report

The *New Statesman* runs a weekly competition of literary endeavour, which is often won by Gerard Benson, a prominent former member of the (now defunct) Quaker Fellowship of the Arts. Their competition of 29 November 2010 asked for “hitherto undiscovered school reports of famous people, whether real or fictional”. I can't remember if Gerard contributed, but my favourite was Bill Greenwell's report on God, as follows -

Law: Rather inclined to lay this down rather than learn.
Science: Must understand that one week's work is no substitute for a full term's application.
Music: His harmonies can be heavenly, but he prefers to bang the drum.
PE: Still moving in a mysterious way.
Maths: Cannot distinguish three from one.
Literature: Must stop getting others to write his essays.
Food and nutrition: His milk and honey recipe is excellent, but not his manna.
Sex education: Alas, the basics of reproduction elude him.
RE: Better now separated from Dawkins minor.
Headmaster's report: God must understand that there is more to school than making pronouncements. It will be a miracle if he is not the source of some serious misunderstanding in the playground.