



Benjamin Lay

NEWSLETTER

SOUTHERN EAST ANGLIA AREA QUAKER MEETING

July 2020

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RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)
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Meetings for Worship

CLACTON

Harwich

COLCHESTER

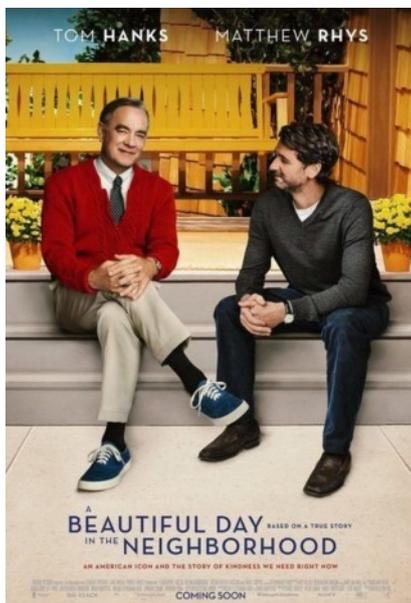
EARLS COLNE

SUDBURY

FIRST CONTACT FOR FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

Alison Parkes

Charles Bather



Area Meeting Report

Chris Samuel

Sixteen Friends and two Attendees were present at Area Meeting on 14 June 2020, conducted online via Zoom.

With sadness, the deaths were recorded of our Friends Jean Bullman at Salisbury, at the age of 103 and of Dorothy Scrivener of Sudbury Meeting at the age of 94, both of whom passed away in April 2020. There were two transfers of membership: Sylvia Frith to Norfolk and Waveney AM and

Editorial

John Hall

During lock-down, we have been watching quite a few DVDs, either orchestral concerts, new films, recommended ones that we have missed over the years or re-visiting old ones. Recently we watched the new Tom Hanks' film *Beautiful day in the neighbourhood*: not a film which I would recommend but which contained one interesting scene. In it, in a busy café the Tom-Hanks character is discussing a tricky situation with another male character and says that he thinks that a minute's silence would be helpful. They settle into silence and as they do, the whole café stops, and all the customers and staff settle. The silence ends, and everybody takes up where they left off. We had a similar experience many years ago.

Before each meal, we always have a period of silence. For a joke in their early years our daughters called it the "Quaker torture" as we sat over our meal, smelling it but waiting to eat. Once, in the South of France, as we sat at our camping table at breakfast, we had our silence. The mother of a Dutch family camping next to us, hushed her children with the words, "They pray". When we started our meal, they too went back to what they were doing. I draw no conclusions from the comparison of fact and fiction apart from the experience of

silence being something more than an absence of noise.

Do you remember what you said the first time you ministered in Meeting? While I remember the topic, I cannot remember a single word of what I said some 55 years ago. What I do remember is the wide-ranging and very helpful ministry which followed. Those words have lived with me and my experience of the Religious Society of Friends over many years and many countries.

We are inclined, perhaps because they come fairly easily, to think that our words will not be remembered. Even quite striking ones can be thought to be inconsequential as when Abraham Lincoln said in his now-famous Gettysburg address, "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here ..." However, as he was to learn, sometimes words live forever.

Being editor has turned out to be more interesting than I could have imagined. Not only do I mostly get to read contributions first, I also am able to help writers with their articles and in some cases, discuss with them in advance what they are about to write about. I have found this month's edition particularly interesting because of the really wide range of topics and some fascinating different approaches to some of those topics. Keep them coming Friends; your readers are looking forward to them.

Bob Crowley to Devon AM. A letter was received from Phylippa (Phyl) Reid of Colchester Meeting, terminating her membership of the Society, but expressing the hope that friendships made during her membership would continue.

Nominations Committee reported that it only currently has three members, and asked Friends to consider whether they could help by offering themselves to serve. As to triennial appointments, it was agreed to release Anne Webb as website manager

and lay down that role. Peter Whiteley was forced by ill health to resign from the clerking team and funeral committee. Our thanks to these Friends for their service was recorded.

Martin Rayner was appointed a Trustee from June 2020 to June 2023, and Anne Watkinson was appointed Meeting Zoom Co-ordinator for the same period.

Jane Herd reported on the proposed Area Meeting Gathering at High Leigh, 26-28 March 2021. In the light of the COVID-19

pandemic, this had had to be reassessed. Due to illness, there were insufficient Friends to organise the weekend. In addition, BYM would be held in the same year, August 2021, which would be an added expense to Friends and to the Area Meeting. If AM were to cancel the event up to 8 months beforehand, they would lose 25% of the cost; after that, 50%. If the event went ahead with 20 places (instead of 30) the cost would be £4,380; *the cost of a Woodbrooke facilitator would be an extra £1,200*. Allowing for the deposit already paid, the cost of cancelling the event would be £702.00. After deliberation it was decided to cancel the AM Gathering, and consider holding an alternative one day AM Gathering at Colchester MH in the autumn of 2020, possibly with a Woodbrooke facilitator.

Robert Parkes reported on Meeting for Sufferings, held online via Zoom on 6 June 2020. One hundred Friends took part online; given the easy chairs participants were able to sit in in their own homes, it was suggested the Meeting be re-titled 'Meeting for Sofas' (Area Meeting microphones were muted at this point, so groans were inaudible). Although it had recently received legacies totalling £7 million pounds, the finances of the Society were still not in a position where income matched expenditure. Friends' House was closed, which meant a loss of income from visitors; Meeting Houses around the country were closed, which meant a loss of income from hirers. With an ageing membership, numbers in the Society have been diminishing, and COVID-19 has tended to accelerate this process. On the other hand, given that it costs the Society around £9,000 to host a Meeting for Sufferings, and there being five a year, conducting online

Meetings represented a financial saving. For the first time in 352 years, BYM was having to be postponed due to COVID-19. There were plans to hold a virtual BYM on 15 November 2020. There is a full report in in *The Friend*.

Anne Watkinson gave a comprehensive report on the heating system at Colchester MH. Anne and the Premises Committee strongly recommended that the boiler be replaced before the winter, that radiators in the Parnell Room be replaced and that there be new radiator thermostats throughout the building and that the new pipe-work be through the ceiling to avoid disturbing the new flooring. The cost of these works would be between £20,000-40,000, but Jenny Kay confirmed that VAT could be re-claimed. Martin Rayner endorsed the need for these works - long delayed - to be carried out urgently; now was a good time as there were currently no hirers. It was agreed that 3 detailed estimates would be provided to the Trustees who would choose which contractor to engage. Anne Dowden asked that the estimates include a priced schedule of works so that VAT could be reclaimed. Jane Herd would look into seeking a grant

of up to £15,000 from Friends' House Meeting House Fund.

Next was the Trustees' report. Treasurer Liz Proctor reported that the value of South East Anglian Area Meeting's investments had fallen from £550,000 to £480,000; the AM holds cash to offset some of this. Trustees had investigated, but insurance would not cover any claims brought against the AM arising from COVID-19, and there was no support available from Essex County Council. It was held to be in right ordering to approach Colchester Borough Council for a grant of up to £10,000 in view of the effect of COVID-19 on the AM's work in providing the Meeting House as a community resource for hirers, and Trustees will make the approach.

Ecky Prolingheuer reported that the Meeting House, currently closed, is regularly checked. It is believed that it may be possible for places of worship to open for worship from 4 July 2020, but only following Government guidelines. Rosalie and Mel were put on furlough, but on full pay. Trustees decided to take Rosalie off furlough for 14 days leading up to 4 July but can then be put on furlough for 3 weeks thereafter.

There was a discussion of the AM's safeguarding policy, particularly proposed changes to the policy, and Data Protection issues arising therefrom. The new draft policy is available on the Area Meeting website: essexsuffolkquakers.org/Business/AMdocuments

Assisted Dying. This was placed on hold for the time being. It had been proposed to arrange a day to discuss this topic, but in view of illness it was not felt appropriate to further this at present.



Advices and Queries for Children

Earlier this year the Colchester Over tens Group on Sunday (COGS) tried to put Advices and Queries into a form that could be understood by children, here are the results.

Part 1

1. Listen to the voice of God inside your head.
2. Lead a good life and learn from Jesus.
3. Help other people.
4. Stop a minute and think.

Part 2

1. We are trying to forget our everyday thoughts and concentrate on those of God. Come relaxed and ready to listen to God. Pray silently, sharing the experiences and friendship in God.

2. Don't think that you are not good enough to be chosen by God to speak in Meeting for Worship. If you feel you have something to say, really think about it, check again before you stand up. You will have a very strong feeling that it is the right thing to do.

3. Try and listen to the things people say remembering if it does not help you, it may help others.

4. Be faithful to God and others.

Part 3

1. Live simply so that others may simply live.

2. Share your gifts with other people.

3. Don't ruin the world around you.

4. Don't watch too much television or you won't do anything else.

Tom Adams, Maud and Harry Grainger, Abigail and Edward Woodman, Of God, To God, In God, With Esme Bradbury and Nina Sutton, God, By God

Meeting for Sufferings

(MfS), on-line, 6th June 2020

Robert Parkes

We are in exceptional times. Unable to gather or worship together in person, this MfS was the first to be held remotely, by video conference. From the comfort of our own homes we became a community of some 100 Quakers connected by the wonder of the internet. The clerking team ably supported by Friends House staff had provided us in advance with some online coaching: Zoom "etiquette", especially the self-disciplined use of the mute button; a panoramic setting that enabled us to scan across the gathering of Friends; and a virtual break-out session to enable us to come together in small groups. As an experiment in online worship and discernment I felt it worked rather well. We could -almost - have been in Friends House, except we had to provide our own refreshments.

We heard from YM treasurer. At the end of 2019 the Society's finances had been boosted by "massive" legacy income amounting to £7million. But we were reminded, this was abnormal. The Society is still not in a position where its regular income is matched by its routine expenditure. This was also before



Covid 19. The closure of Friends House and the income stream from the Quiet Company has been felt keenly. The loss of hirers is hitting many AMs hard which is expected to affect contributions to BYM. It was put to us bluntly: the Society of Friends in Britain is shrinking. That of itself was prompting lots of questions about its future. The pandemic is propelling us to consider them rather soon than anticipated.

On the plus side, unexpected savings are already starting to emerge. Going online for this MfS, for example, saved £9000 (excluding staff costs). We can expect this to be the "new normal" for some time. We heard too about some of the largely positive experiences of online meetings for worship, in terms of greater inclusion. For example, there are Friends with underlying health conditions that make physically coming

to meeting nigh on impossible. Attending by Zoom gives them a sense of greater inclusivity. On the other hand, of course, online worship brings with it a whole new set of privileges. What about those Friends who for whatever reason have no online access? To what extent are they being marginalised by the pace of change? What happens to the sense of fellowship and to the discernment?

Some of these questions were developed in our breakout session. Online worship is it seems a bit like Marmite. Many Friends and meetings have adapted well, others have struggled. One young Friend said meeting online enhanced for her the sense of worship, especially as there was no actual meeting house nearby anyway. Another older Friend took the opposite view: meeting online diminished his experience. The parameters of diversity and inclusion have shifted, not necessarily in ways we could have anticipated. How do we go forward?

There is a proposal to reduce the number of MfS per year from five to four. Friends were generally not happy with this, especially as the residential at Woodbrooke is not expected to go ahead this year, due

to Covid. This will be kept under review.

The public health restrictions currently in force have meant changes have had to be made to the planned dates for holding Yearly Meetings in 2020 and 2021. After an unbroken sequence for 352 years the Yearly Meeting Gathering planned for 1-7 August 2020 has been postponed due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. An experimental online “virtual BYM” is being proposed,

probably for a couple of hours on Sunday 15th November. This will be capped at 1000 delegates – yes, a 1000-person video conference. Interesting times indeed.

As usual, a full report of the meeting and papers can be found on the dedicated MfS pages on the Quaker.org website. MfS also gets widely reported in *The Friend*

On-line Meetings for Worship Survey

Rhiannon Grant (Woodbrooke)

At the end of March 2020, when Britain was locked down due to the pandemic, Quakers in Britain like many other suddenly had choices to make. Just stop? Move online? Find other solutions? In May, the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies at Woodbrooke agreed with Britain Yearly Meeting that we would run a quick ‘snapshot’ survey to ask Quakers what was going on and find out what decisions they had made. We asked a few simple questions in an online form and managed in just three weeks to get answers from more than half the local meetings in Britain (and some area meetings). Here we want to share some of our initial results.

Most meetings for worship are now online in some form

At least 54% of local meetings moved to an online or remote format for worship. The majority use Zoom video conferencing software. A small number use other software, such as email, Chatzy, or WhatsApp. A significant minority of meetings are worshipping ‘together apart’ without using any technology, sitting in worship at home at a pre-arranged time, or only using technology before and/or afterward the period of worship. For example, a meeting might send out an image of flowers by email before 10:30am, all sit in worship at home for an hour, then share ministry by email after 11:30am.



Some meetings have grouped together, either a few local meetings or all those in the area meeting. 30% of area meetings told us that they are worshipping all together. In some cases, local meetings are also holding worship, either at the same time or another time.

A small number of meetings – about 6% of those who replied to the survey, and we estimate about 10% of the total – are not meeting for worship at all. They may be keeping in touch by phone or email.

About the same number of people attend worship online

Although some meetings have seen higher numbers and others have seen lower attendance, on average about the same number of people are attending worship online as were attending worship in person before the pandemic.

Worshipping online enables us to include some people who cannot otherwise attend

Several people who answered the survey noted that their meeting had roughly the same *number* of people attending, but these were not

the *same* people. Those at a distance (sometimes a considerable distance, e.g. in another country) and those with some disabilities are more likely to join, while those with no access to or little knowledge of technology, or other disabilities, were less likely to join. In the future, we might want to think about hybrid meetings, or running multiple kinds of meeting, to make our worship as accessible as possible.

For those who are online, there are now more options to attend Quaker worship.

Remote worship, Zoom, and other online options, local and area meeting worship, and international possibilities all add to the richness of our community. We are visiting other meetings more easily, catching up with old friends or meeting new ones, and we are being joined by others from around the world. This happens in Woodbrooke’s online meetings for worship throughout the week and when Quakers from Britain join Pendle Hill, Ben Lomond, or other online meetings for worship based in other countries.



Millennium Development Goals

United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), set in 2000

Rod Usher

Water supply and improved sanitation

Access to sustainable, safe drinking water and basic sanitation in the developing world

It has been suggested that 3,900 children die each day because they do not have access to safe drinking water; one in five people do not have safe drinking water. So extreme is the situation that many of the conflicts in semi-arid and arid areas of the world focus around the struggle for water.

Many on-going conflicts are driven by shortage of water:

- as the nomads and settled tribes dispute scarce supplies in an area - e.g. Darfur
- in areas of continuing conflict - witness Syria in recent years; Iraq; Yemen.

Population explosions:

Rapidly expanding urban populations, which place further strain on water supplies. Witness many massive cities in Africa.

Whole families move towards improvements in healthcare, available work, and better education.

Adequate clean water leads to: reduced child and maternal mortality, and a reduction in serious disease. Both contribute towards further increases in population.

In years of drought and catastrophe there is increased migration towards areas of reliable water supply—large towns and cities. e.g. Khartoum and Omdurman, separated by the mighty Nile.

Improved basic sanitation in large towns leads to greater use of scarce water. Without sanitation, stagnant water leads to a higher incidence of malaria and serious diseases.

Need for Action

A recent article in The Lancet has highlighted the urgent need for adequate water supplies to be taken seriously by the developed world.

Lack of water kills more people than war, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Lack of safe water are the most common reasons for illness – the World Health Organisation estimates 1.6 million people die each year from this problem alone.

WHO has also suggested that every \$ invested in improved water and sanitation would yield an economic return of between \$3 and \$34, depending on the location in the world.

British political action?

How can the British Government continue to countenance war and the supply of arms to warring countries when the opportunity to enhance the lives of tens of millions through the provision of clean water is glaringly obvious.

What can be done?

Quakers have been instrumental in championing the Fair Trade Movement.

Many island economies in the Caribbean, for instance, have been transformed by fair trade. Determined groups and informal organisations can and do heighten greater awareness of key issues for development. Perhaps water is the next topic to be placed under the ‘concerned microscope’. Should the issues of

clean water and improved sanitation be priorities for Quakers?

Water Aid and several major charities support rural communities to develop simple water storage systems. Simple wells are sunk in many areas with rapidly growing populations.

Toby Gould, of Colchester Meeting, is a water engineer who trains and advises many communities Africa.

Conclusions:

1. The sanitation crisis must be raised to the top of the agenda.

2. Donor countries in the United Nations must invest in water supply, improved sanitation and water management.

Clean water would bring Light into the lives of so many people. As Quakers we must support the UN Millennium Goal on clean water and improved sanitation in every way we can.

Editor's note: On one occasion when Rod had to travel two days in a lorry with balloon tyres, over the desert in Sudan without any sort of tracks, to invigilate exams in a very small village he was given a pint glass filled with water that he could not see through! The journey had been tough and very dry—he drank it down without hesitation.

The Millennium Development Goals

Eight Goals for 2015



The Cloak - a Parable

Janet Thomas

If it is a truth universally acknowledged that bullies are very often victims themselves, then this truth was of little help to the heroine of my tale – not at the time itself, that is...

Quiet, shy, timid, an easy target for the children who taunted her with phrases such as “zero charisma!” from a boy who had heard it in a famous American film of the time. The girl, not knowing what it meant, looked up the word charisma. “Strong ability to attract people, and to inspire loyalty and admiration”, she read. She did not even have a smidgen of this, it seemed. Much later she realised that the same could have been said of the boy, who probably did not know what the word meant either, but at that time, she was devastated. She had no personality. She might as well not exist at all in this world.

Time passed. Some of the children began mysteriously disappearing from the school. It seemed they were chosen for being “differ-

ent”. One was her only friend from a gypsy settlement; others were of a different religion from her own. A couple were autistic or had physical disabilities.

One day the girl came upon a bundle of material on the ground. On closer inspection it proved to be the cloak of her missing gypsy friend. Picking it up and wrapping it around herself, she suddenly felt like a girl in a film or a book. It was magical. She started to wear it every day. The other children admired her in her cloak: it gave her a new persona and she blossomed within its protection. Having now become attractive to others, she had charisma!

She had certainly changed, but sadly not all was well. After a while, she began to use her newly acquired power in manipulating her spellbound followers to turn on less assertive children who were like she herself once was.

Sometime later, the pupils learned what had happened to the missing children. It was horrific, and it had all begun with a “charismatic leader”. Suddenly, “charis-

ma” had another meaning. Ironically, it seemed that it could be used for evil just as easily as for good. Her Cloak now became a symbol to her of that evil, in the way she had behaved to the less assertive children.

Thinking about these accumulated experiences led her to an interest into the study of behaviour and personality, then eventually to University where she graduated in psychology and sociology. On her graduation day she wore her cap and her gown: her new Cloak. She was to gain even more of these Cloaks as she went on to achieve her Doctorate in the study of Psychology.

Throughout her adult life, she helped many people and inspired them with her research, her books and her practice. She had become a “personality”, and this time a force for good. The cloak and the gowns now hung next to each other in her wardrobe, symbolising both her life, and what had become her life’s work.

Meditation on a Meeting

Bob Brewer

In meeting today, I had much effort to centre down into the meeting. I was given to imagine that a column of white light descended from Above to the crown of my head. In my imagination, this I drew down through to the base. I concentrated on the nature of that which it revealed. I saw that the Spirit of my body had been assailed by many wounds: parts cudgelled by hard blunt savage words, lashings and slashings by slanders and the evisceration of ones bowels by long knife; insinuations due to jealousies. All symptoms of deprecations by those who judge others by race, colour, creed, sexuality and social class.

I was brought to an anecdote of youth that reads “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!” How wrong this is: in-fact the reverse is true! This is a device to deflect one from the reality of the truth of the matter. A magician's pass of the hand will deflect the attention of the mind. All the words of hate articulated, the expletives not deleted, conjoin as a barrage of insults and subjugation to those afflicted peoples. In ancient Jewish history, a conquistador placed his feet over the neck of the fallen in battle. For a subjugated fallen to cry out ‘I cannot breathe’ then be strangled to death, that would have been taboo. Anatomically, if the pressure on his neck had been withheld for a few minutes, then the enslaved person would have survived.



Some years back, I was asked to see and pray with a daughter of a friend who was dying of cancer in hospital. The mother was very anxious and overprotective of the daughter and situation. I visited the daughter in her hospital bed, she said that she wanted to die after the baby was born. This struck me as odd—why did she not just say that she would like to see her baby. She had emphasised that she wanted to die! We

prayed together alone. In the session, I perceived that as a 15-year-old girl she attended a coffee morning with her mother. The topic of conversation drifted to extramarital sex; to which the mother exclaimed rather vehemently “I would rather die than be called a whore!” When I reported back to the mother and then to the daughter who then cried out “Oh that is it!” The baby’s biological father was not the husband of the suffering mother. She then decided not to see her mother ever again and referred herself to a terminal hospice to die in peace. She died before the baby could be born. One may consider that the suffering young mother had been programmed to self-destruct after an honest Catholic marriage oath “till death do us part”.

One wonders if her death certificate should have read, “cause of death by virtue of the ingestion of toxic words”. It is “all in The Air” just like invisible NO₂ nitrogen dioxide as released by diesel engines. They are so so efficient but so are words!

Benjamin Lay

Dorian Kelly

For those who despair at the treatment of black people, I bring you a positive story of one of the greatest sons of Colchester, the abolitionist Benjamin Lay. Benjamin Lay? No? Have you heard of William Wilberforce?

It is a pretty safe bet that for every 1,000 people who know of William Wilberforce, no more than the odd one might have heard of Benjamin Lay. In many ways this is understandable enough, but if anyone deserves to be remembered as one of Colchester’s greatest sons, it is the gloriously improbable and largely forgotten Quaker, at least in his home town, who became one of the greatest figures in the world in the abolition of the slave trade.

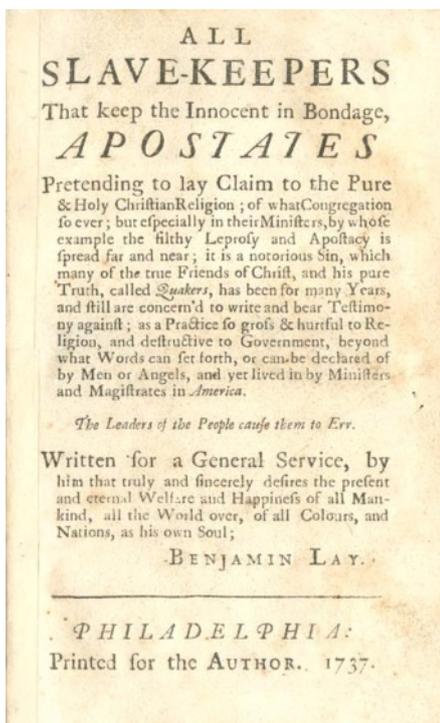
He was born in Copford in 1682, to second-generation Quaker parents. He was a hunchback with a projecting chest, and his arms were as long as his legs and so spindly that they could barely support in weight, in fact legs which might put John Cooper Clarke himself to blame.

He was a strict vegetarian; he ate only fruits, vegetables, and honey, and drank only milk and water. He did not believe that humans were superior to non-human animals and created his own clothes to boycott the slave-labour industry. He would not wear anything, nor eat anything, made from the loss of animal life or provided by any degree by slave labour. He might have been a Quaker, but as the meeting very quickly discovered he was no quiet meek Quaker, but quick in tongue and harsh in criticism of the other members for their unfair commercial dealings and power seeking. He made it his business, his vocation, to be a thorn in the sides of his 18th-century brethren. They put up with him for quite a while, endlessly, and hopelessly, trying to shut up or kick out their most violent and exhibitionist critic. but eventually his sheer rudeness and forthright words

forced them to ban him from attending meetings.

He was apprenticed first to his uncle, a glover with a shop in Colchester High Street, but he didn’t seem to last very long, presumably fell out with him, and went to work instead for another uncle in a farm near Colchester where again he didn't last long, and instead went to sea for ten years as a common sailor—goodness only knows how he fared—then improbably found a wife Sarah Smith as small and deformed as he was and pitched up in Barbados where he planned to open a general store. But what he saw there horrified him: everywhere he looked he saw slaves starved to death, he saw them beaten to death and tortured to death, and he was horrified. He first began advocating for the abolition of slavery when, he saw an enslaved man commit suicide rather than be hit again by his owner. His passionate enmity of slavery was partially fuelled by his Quaker beliefs. Lay made several dramatic demonstrations against the practice. He once stood outside a Quaker meeting in winter with no coat and at least one foot bare and in the snow. When passers by expressed concern for his health, he said that slaves were made to work outdoors in winter dressed as he was.

Unable to stand it any longer he set forth for Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly love and made himself known to the local Quakers there, who he persuaded to write to Colchester for the necessary reference. For some reason they gave him one and the he set about raising Cain with them once he had discovered to his horror that most of them were slave owners. For the next 25 years he waged a virtual one-man guerrilla campaign against the city’s Quaker ‘apostates’, terrorising them in their meeting houses and savaging them in print with a prophetic fury that harked back to the first heady days of the Commonwealth.



He had a propensity for theatrical tricks to drive his points home. Once he entered the Meeting for Worship dressed as a soldier with a sword. Denouncing the evils of slavery, pierced his Bible with his sword. Concealed in his Bible was a bladder filled with red juice that splattered onto Friends sitting near him, symbolizing the blood on Quakers' hands for not standing firm against slavery. On another occasion he kidnapped the child of one of the more prominent Quakers and hid him at home for two days. When he judged the mother was sufficiently distressed and agitated, he returned the child saying, "There you are madam, now you know how a negro woman feels when her child is taken from her".

They soon followed the example of Colchester and ejected him from their society, which in Pennsylvania, a state founded by and run by the Quakers meant virtual exclusion from society. But he met and befriended someone incredibly important – Benjamin Franklin, a future Founding Father of the USA, who would publish Lay's book, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates*.

When he was first invited to tea, he enquired whether the person

who served it was a slave or a free man, saying that if he was a slave he would be out of the door quick sharp, but finding him to be free invited him to sit with them and eat the sandwiches.

After the death of his wife, Lay went to live in a simple cave, with a roof of evergreen and an extensive library. Lay's favourite meal was "turnips boiled, and afterwards roasted", while his drink of choice was "pure water". He made his own clothes from flax to avoid the exploitation of animals - he would not even use the wool of sheep.

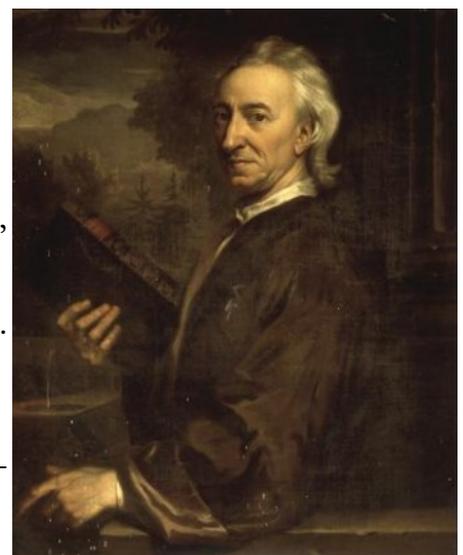
Lay's passionate fight against slavery broadened into a democratic and egalitarian opposition to exploitation – animal, human, environmental – in all its forms. Benjamin may have been the most radical person on the planet. His picture is everywhere in Philadelphia.

In 1758, the year before Lay died aged 77, the Philadelphia Quakers ruled they must no longer take part in the slave trade. The Quakers would go on to be at the forefront of the campaign against slavery, which would ultimately be abolished in the US in 1865. He was buried in an unmarked grave next to his wife.

Weirdly, considering that he eschewed worldly goods he left 40 lbs of whalebone and 12000 pins. Equally curiously before he left for America, he had donated £218 6s 0d - a huge sum- to Colchester Quakers in trust for the poor of Colchester. That trust cannot be traced today, it was probably rolled up in the 60s.

Benjamin Lay. Colchester's greatest son perhaps? He helped us to understand what was thinkable and what was politically and morally possible in the first half of the 18th century – and what may be possible now.

(First published on Facebook 13 June 2020. In November 2018, Area Meeting minuted (in part), *Benjamin Lay was a prophetic voice who was ahead of his time. Today, in a reputedly "post-truth" era, we must speak up for the value of truth, and in particular examine our own consciences. While we cannot put right the wrongs of the past, we can quietly declare what our consciences have revealed to be the truth of what happened to Benjamin Lay.*)



Evelyn in Colchester and Ipswich, 1656

Bill McMellon

8TH July To Colchester, a fair town, but now wretchedly demolished by that late siege, especially the suburbs, which were all burnt, but were then repairing. The town is built on a rising ground, having fair meadows on one side, and a river with a strong ancient castle, said to have been built by King Coilus, father of Helena, mother of Constantine the great, of whom I find no memory save at the pinnacle of one of their wool staple houses, where there

is a statue of Coilus in wood, wretchedly carved. The walls are exceeding strong, deeply trenched, and filled with earth. It has six gates, and some watch towers, and some handsome churches. But what was showed us as a kind of miracle at the outside of the castle, the wall where Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle, those valiant and noble persons who so bravely behaved themselves in the last siege were barbarously shot, murdered by Ireton in cold blood, after surrendering on articles; having been disappointed of relief from the Scotch army, which had been defeated by the King at Worcester.

The place was bare of grass for a large space, all the rest of it abounding with herbage. For the rest, this is a ragged and factious town, now swarming with sectaries. Their trading is in cloth with the Dutch, and baize and says with Spain; It is the only place in

England where these stuffs are made unsophisticated. It is also famous for oysters and eringo root, growing here-about and candied for sale.

Went to Dedham, a pretty country town, having a very fair church, finely situated, the valley well watered. Here I met with Dr. Stokes, a young gentleman, but an excellent mathematician. This is a clothing town, as most are in Essex but lies in the unwholesome hundreds.

Hence to Ipswich, doubtless one of the sweetest, most pleasant, well built towns in England. It has twelve fair churches, many noble houses, especially the Lord Devereux's; a brave quay, and commodious harbour, being about seven miles from the main; an ample market place. Here was born the great Cardinal Wolsey, who began a place here which was not finished.

I had the curiosity to visit some Quakers here in prison; a new fanatical sect of dangerous principles, who show no respect to any man, magistrate, or other, and seem a melancholic, proud sort of people, and exceedingly ignorant. One of these was said to have fasted twenty days; but another, endeavouring to do the like, perished on the 10th, when he would have eaten but could not.

Throwing Stones

Antony Johae

Her head, scarf-covered, protrudes from a heap of stones,
cheeks are henna-red, sin-coloured.
Eleven like-women and one errant husband
await the pile and throwing of stones.
This one they say is innocent but zealot knows better.
He'll not leave whores alive to render pleasure
nor let cowed wives fall to a tender touch
or have men treasure each other beyond decorous kiss.
No – he would rather see them pelted out of sight.

There was a man who looking up from writing with his finger on the ground
saw those with stones in their hands set to throw at a hapless woman
caught, they said, in adulterous, venereal act;
but he would have none of judgement and invited them thus:
He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.
And they recalling their lusts and longings dropped their arms
and departed. Only the woman stood there still, uncondemned, contrite
while her saviour made further marks on the earth.

(from *Poems of the East*)

Thoughts in solitary isolation

An anti-isolationist

You know how couples grow to resemble each other, as dog owners grow to look like their dogs? There were many occasions when I had to change my pullover because it was the same colour as that of my other half.

As each of us is unique so each of our relationships are unique. Some couples do indeed grow to be strikingly similar to one another, in their conversation and how they anticipate each other. But others not at all. This is the superficial visible stuff – that friends and neighbours see.

I am more interested in what passes between these couples. What privacies they share, what humiliations and embarrassments are known only between the pair of them. It would be interesting to know if the couples who share the most intimate secrets between them also have outside friends with whom they share intimate secrets. We shall never know.

Looking round a room full of couples one notices the extroverts, male or female, who seem to have lots of

close friends but this is no measure of what really intimate secrets husband A shares with husband X or wife B with wife Y.

But each couple, in the fullness of time, becomes a person. A single person might never have had intimate secrets outside his/her spousal relationship. But another single person may hold many old intimacies not only with a former spouse, but with others. Those latter intimacies are important, not necessarily in themselves, but as keys to a new relationship with the original sharer of the secret, once we become single persons.

Compare the position of a single (probably elderly) person, who has spent a lifetime sharing intimacies with only one other, perhaps a spouse who is no longer present. Compare that single person with another who has by chance shared intimacies not only with a spouse, but with others.

The latter almost certainly has a ring of acquaintances with whom he or she can discuss current problems. Compared to the former who almost certainly has no other person on earth with whom he or she can talk about immediate private issues. This may be the difference between having a wide choice of others with whom tough questions can be aired and, on the other hand, deep loneliness.

Is this a recommendation that, as we grow older, we make sure that we do not restrict our private chats to only one other – usually a spouse?

It would, indeed, be useful to plan our dotage, to prepare for the unthinkable when we are but one person. But there's the rub – it is unthinkable to most of us.