



Almeley Wootton Quaker News

October 2023

<https://almeleyquakers.org.uk>

<https://smquakers.org.uk>

Book Launch—A Friend In Deed by Maggie Waldman

On Wednesday October 4th approximately 40 people gathered in the Meeting House for the launch of a new book about Henry Stanley Newman, published by the Orphans Press in Leominster. ([A Friend In Deed - Orphans Publishing](#))



"Quaker philanthropist Henry Stanley Newman, the longest-serving editor of The Friend, was a key figure in the revival of membership and interest in the Society of Friends in Radnorshire during the late nineteenth century. A grocer by trade, he went on to found both the Leominster Orphans Homes and a printing business to support that cause, and was deeply interested in education of both adults and children at home and overseas. Informed by his faith, his story is one of an ordinary life extraordinarily well-lived. Author Maggie Waldman was awarded the QFHS Margaret Bennett Small Research Award to produce this first full-length biography of one of history's influential Quakers."

Maggie Waldman told us a little about the Henry Stanley Newman and the orphanage he established which for its day was quite remarkable and, as Stella Sterry remarked, as far removed from the Victorian orphanages described by Dickens as possible. There was a strong accent on creating a safe and loving environment and on securing a future for the orphans when they reached an employable age - hence the establishment of The Orphans Press. We were joined by Cynthia Prior who had talked to us at Area Meeting during our 350th celebrations about her grandmother growing up in the orphanage. What impressed me most was the author's reference to letters she had uncovered from some who grew up in the orphanage describing those times as the happiest days of their lives.

Helen Briggs



Almeley Wootton Christmas Event

This year's Christmas event is to be held after Meeting for Worship on Sunday 10th of December at the Meeting House. Please look out for requests for help, food and entertainment in the Correspondence Clerk's weekly update.

An Introduction to Pagan Christianity

Quaker customs from early origins have shied away from any association with pagan constructs in society, hence the refusal to use names of days based on planet worship, Saturns day, Moons day, and Norse gods, Wodens day, Thors day, and so on, similarly with months, substituting numbers, the first day, second month etc. However, that ignores the ancient truths embedded in the history of mankind trying to come to terms with his existence and relationship with the world.

Why Pagan Christianity?

Pagan comes from the Latin 'paganus', lit. people of the countryside, the heath (heathen), the simple 'uncivilised' people of the areas outside the city still worshipping the gods of the natural realm.

By my reckoning, a man of God known as Jesus of Nazareth was a rural preacher of a new gospel using the language that rural people would understand, taking most of his parables from a country perspective. Not for him a retreat to a comfortable bolt hole to reflect on his future. His chosen place was the wilderness, the wildness, and to pray to his Father the chosen place was a mountain, far away from the maddening crowds.

So, with my part Celtic inheritance, some of my pagan roots coincide with the Church cycle based on movements of the planets, notably the sun, Christmas= Winter Solstice, Easter and LadyDay= Spring Equinox, but thereafter the main Christian festivals coincide with Celtic festivals which pre-date Christianity by many thousands of years.

Ancient festivals were based on the movement of the sun, solstice and equinox, but also 45 days after each of these was a summer feast or winter fire festival. Feasting and drinking always were important!

So the Celtic year began with **Samhain**, a fire festival gathering in early November to indicate the death of the trees as they shed their leaves marking the beginning of the dark months and a time to remember the ancestors, bringing out the skulls of relatives, or even conquered enemies, a time to reflect on their past. (Hence turnip/pumpkin skulls). How apt that this should be adopted as All Saint and All Souls! And Guy Fawkes and Remembrance Sunday?

The Mid Winter Solstice marked the change of direction of the sun, and gave hope that the next year will be fruitful. No one knows when Jesus was born but it fits.

Imbolc, 45 days after winter solstice is a fire festival to celebrate the first day of the spring awakening as the birds begin to see the lighter skies, pairing begins, and the lengthening days begin to be more noticeable, a time adopted by the Church as Candlemas to celebrate the new light in Christ.

Easter is a movable feast in the Church to reflect the difference between the monthly moon cycle and the **Spring Equinox** which equates with the Hebrew Passover and the escape from Egypt. But the Equinox is always around 21st March (depending on leap year). And the Egyptians worshiped the sun, is there a link to the biblical story here?

Beltain celebrates the beginning of the warm summer weather at the beginning of May= May Day and Pentecost/Trinity in the Church, Whitsun in my childhood.

The Summer Solstice, mid summer and the start of the vegetable and fruit harvest, long awaited plentiful food for communal feasting to celebrate the occasion, the first fruits!

Lughnasa in early August marks the start of the cereal harvest, the first grains to make bread, normally barley loaves, and in the Church calendar marked as Lammas.

An Introduction to Pagan Christianity continued

The Autumnal Equinox on 21st September, often the end of the grain harvest, many Harvest Festivals start now. But it is also celebrated as St Michael and All Angels.

And so the Celtic year comes to an end, mirrored by the 'Christian' calendar, so are we all pagans deep down, and should we celebrate together the movements of the planet? Certainly in our wonderful Marches/Herefordshire countryside we should spend more time ministering alongside the natural world and seasons when conditions allow, individually or as Friends. George Fox started his ministry in the open air, perhaps after our experiences through lockdown we follow the Celts practice and 'feast' on biscuits and coffee ?!!

Jeff Glyn-Jones

The 'Awe' industry

Dear Friends, I feel I should apologise for sending this to our newsletter, it will be an uncomfortable read for many of us, including me, but we do need to challenge ourselves now and again. When I came across this I saw the author, Chandran Nair, talking about it online and when I read the article he was being interviewed about I was suitably disturbed. What follows is an extract from an article he wrote for 'Resurgence Magazine' this Summer. It is an idea I am familiar with, and broadly agree with, but to see it written down like this really was rather stark.

The 'Awe' industry

Chandran Nair, founder of the Global Institute for Tomorrow, says nobody is entitled to a sense of 'awe', and not only is it high time to leave Nature and all her glories alone, but the time has come for an active managed retreat.

I recently attended a conference in France, near Mont Blanc, where I was invited to comment on a discussion about the beauty of experiencing what mountains have to offer – how they affect people who have the opportunity to 'enjoy' them. Attendees at the conference, many of whom are avid mountaineers or lovers of the joys of experiencing wilderness, spoke to the spectrum of positive impacts that being in mountainous landscapes confers: exercise, fresh air, a closeness to Nature that cannot be explained by mere words, bonding with peers in ways that are often not part of daily life, a sense of freedom and even a meditative and spiritual effect. The discussion moved towards the importance of finding ways to make mountains more accessible to those without the means of exploring them.

My response to this somewhat broke the reverie: is it not time that humans consider leaving mountains – and more broadly wilderness – alone? Is it not time that humans, who now number eight billion, act intelligently to enable a managed retreat from Nature? Don't we already know from our collective scientific data that the assault on Nature and the biosphere is a direct result of our inability to respect limits and boundaries in search of economic growth, to feed our curiosity, or to satisfy our desire for pleasure? And is it not the most privileged of us who are the biggest culprits?

... We need to completely recalibrate our relationship with Nature and the wilderness with regard to our preoccupation with the notion that we have a right to enjoy it like any other commodity. And that means rejecting the idea that just because one can afford to travel to places of natural beauty, one is entitled to awe and pleasure.

If you have the stomach to read the whole thing, go to <https://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article6156-the-awe-industry.html>

Maggie Taylor Sanders

The Eighth Day

I wonder if you have come across the writings of Christian Bobin (1951-2022). He was born in Le Creusot in Burgundy and his writings are very well known in France and sell in quietly astonishing numbers. The Eighth Day – a selection of his writings - was translated into English in 2015. His work is unusual. I think one would call him an essayist but his prose is poetic. I suspect he was a Catholic but one with a most individual idea of a god, an intense appreciation of the natural world and all the arts.



The Eighth Day consists of quite short pieces. Some are almost like fairy tales imbued with humour and originality, but he admits also to sadness of mood:

Melancholy is up each morning one minute before me, like someone stealing my light, it stands between the window and me.

He reflects much on the natural world:

The humblest things – fruits and stones, grasses and stars alike – invite us to an endless feast day.

God blows past the sitting room window in a gust of laughter, disguised as a small yellow leaf, twirling.

And he contemplates paintings and says:

A painter is someone who wipes the window pane between the world and us with light, with a rag made of light, soaked in silence.

There is an account of visiting his father in a home for sufferers with dementia – a piece written with gentleness and insight:

Over the course of a year, I visited my father where his memory shrank day by day, as vapour on glass shrinks at the sun's touch, He didn't always know me, and it didn't matter. I was well aware that he was my father, and this allowed him to forget it. The connection between two persons may lie so deep that it lives on even when one of them can no longer see it.

His view on silence appeals:

Silence is the highest form of thought, and it is in developing in us this mute attention to the day that we will find the absolute that surrounds us. It falls to us- when all things fail us and depart – to give to our life the patience of a work of art, the flexibility of reeds under the rough hand of the wind, a homage paid to winter. A little silence is enough.

But it was this last quote I was reminded of in one meeting of the Spiritual Exploration group, for it seemed to unite theists and non-theists alike:

I should like to know how to pray, I should like to know how to cry for help, how to thank, how to wait, how to love, how to weep, I should like to know what can't be learnt, but I know none of it, all I know is how to sit and let God in to do the work for me, God, or more often, for one mustn't be demanding, one of his go-betweens, rain, snow, the laughter of children, Mozart.

Janet Robinson

The Sacred Return of Lost Things

This summer I was able to spend a few days in Liverpool staying in Albert Dock, very near to Tate Liverpool. This year was the 12th Liverpool Biennial which is the UK's largest free festival of contemporary art. The theme was 'uMoya: The Sacred Return of Lost Things'. 'uMoya is an isiZulu word meaning spirit, soul, breath, air, wind, temper and climate. The exhibition was an attempt to return to that which has been lost and taken from those who have been silenced or forgotten. The Biennial focussed on what the future might look like when using 'uMoya as a guide and it connected the city's colonial past as well as uncovering possibilities for joy, healing and aliveness in its future. The curator, Khanyisile Mbongwa, had real vision in a time of such global instability.

Eleven artists' work featured in the Tate and I have chosen two. Many more made a huge impression on me and have been food for contemplation and inspiration long after I arrived home.

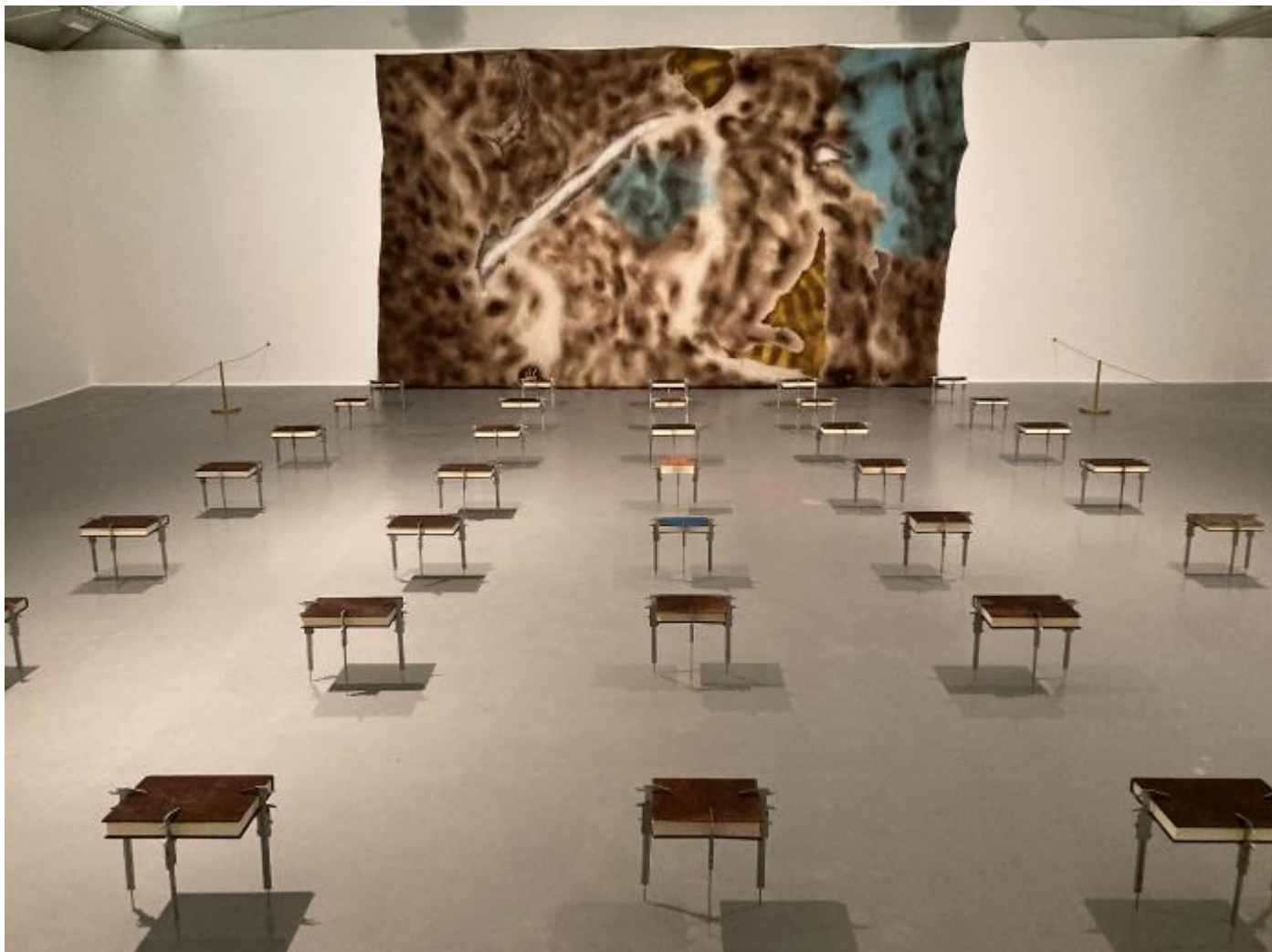
Isa do Rosário's textile work 'Iansá' is vibrant. She is led by spiritual conversions with Orixás, an African religion developed in Brazil during 19th century. Orixás are believed to be ancestors who have been deified and represent the forces of nature. Through Orixás, Rosário is led to have spiritual conversations with those who lost their lives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This large and intricate textile comes directly from this connection and communication and creates a meditation space for remembering, mourning and ascension. Iansá is the goddess of wind; it was the winds that brought the slave ships into Liverpool.



Isa do Rosário – Iansá (2022/2023)

The Sacred Return of Lost Things continued

Francis Offman's installation 'Untitled' is a meditation on the Rwandan genocide and conveys a violent history through objects with a personal connection. Offman's mother fled Rwanda with her family at the beginning of the civil war. The floor was filled with books, each held up with callipers which were the instruments used by Belgian colonisers to measure the facial features of the Rwandan people and classify them into racial groups. In the middle are two Bibles (red and blue), representing Offman's mother's Bible, and the only ones not covered with coffee grounds. The pattern on the fabric on the wall was also made from grounds, all emphasising the contrast between the pleasure of drinking coffee (a major export of Rwanda) and the violence of the war. Offman wanted to demonstrate how personal experience is central to collective histories and healing.



Francis Offman – Untitled (2022)

Kate Binney October 2023

(The Biennial guide to this exhibition was most helpful in writing this article.)

Quaker Structures: an exploration of the structures of Britain Yearly Meeting

Date Saturday 18 November 2023 10:00-11:30 (UK time) Cost—Free

Woodbrooke are holding an online Zoom course to look at the structures within Britain Yearly Meeting and hear about the work of other Quaker organisations and committees, including Woodbrooke, Friends World Committee for Consultation, Young Friends General Meeting, Central Nominations Committee and more in the UK and beyond. Follow the link for further information. [Quaker Structures: an exploration of the structures of Britain Yearly Meeting - Woodbrooke](#)

(Area Meeting at Hereford is also on the 18th which is a blended meeting)

Quiet Quakers

By June they are hidden by the seedheads,
Fritillary, bluebell, speedwell, all needing to seed,
Carrying another season in their dusty care.
But as spring stands down, the stones stand out.
All the same but all so different.
Father, grandfather, daughter, niece
Here and gone, near and far,
Old and sadly new.
The quiet Quakers.

Oh, what a loud and life affirming silence here!
Wrens in stereo, blackbird, wise-crack crow,
Anxious wood pigeon - 'Take two cows Joseph,
Take two cows Joseph, two!'
The thrush who knows a phrase sung once
Is never enough, a robin - of course.
The sheep, the wind, the leaves,
The sounds of now, the sounds of then.
This thin place, this quiet place,
Earthbound and eternal.

*Almeley Wootton Quaker Burial Ground June
2023*

Carey Glyn-Jones



Meeting for Learning

On December 6th at 2pm we are being joined by Ann Davison and Colin Brown who will become the joint Clerks of Area Meeting from January 1st.

They are coming as our invited guests for December's Meeting for Learning and will talk a little about their lives and also about their thoughts for the future of Southern Marches Area Meeting. Ann is currently the Southern Marches representative on Meetings for Suffering and Colin is the Clerk of Abergavenny Meeting.