

# Hedyn

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*South Wales Area Meeting*

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Issue One | 2022



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## From the Editors

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Recently I took a holiday in Madeira, travelling abroad for the first time since 2019. On a day tour of the capital Funchal, I was careful to cover my knees and shoulders, even though it was a hot day, as we might visit a church and Madeira is a strongly Roman Catholic country.

I felt rather embarrassed that I had forgotten that on a hot day, there was something else to remember. Having been followed around Funchal cathedral by a woman tutting at me loudly, a man blocked my passage and demanded that I removed my hat. I apologised to him and did so - quite literally, 'When in Rome ...'

However, I could not resist the calling to talk about this at Meeting for Worship the next Sunday and to read Quaker Faith & Practice 19.16, which is Thomas Ellwood's story of offending others by not removing his hat. Reading it again, I realised that I had not noticed before that his joy was partly because 'I had not been drawn out into compliance with [those who removed their hat on meeting others]'

In a world where we are met daily with calls to harshness, greed, intolerance and an acceptance of inequality, may we keep our Quaker values dear, even when others try to draw us into compliance with others.

*David Heald*  
Cardiff

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## News from Meetings

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### *Swansea*

It has been a quiet winter for Swansea Meeting. Quite a few Friends have regularly attended Meetings for Worship in person or on Zoom in blended meetings and some have supported various climate change and anti-racism gatherings in Swansea. However, overall, there has not been much of an appetite for extra communal activities and events within the meeting itself, maybe because of the conditions imposed by Covid restrictions and also maybe low energy levels.

That said, our Support and Sharing groups have continued throughout. These were started many years ago on the suggestion of Audrey Davies who had experienced them in a previous Local Meeting. Before Covid, Friends met regularly in a few Friends' homes and brought food to share for supper or afternoon tea. Eating together whilst being together was a catalyst for getting to know one another more deeply. During the winter, when we can't be together outdoors, the groups are meeting on Zoom which is not quite the same, but better than nothing.

Some of the groups are more structured than others and meetings for worship are included in the sessions. Others are simply social, sharing joys, sorrows, and problems. Yet others are a mixture. The main thing is that we get to know one another really well. Sharing our thoughts and experiences helps some Friends make important decisions in their lives and comforts others in knowing that they were being upheld and understood. We also can vent safely or have good laughs whilst enjoying the pleasure of one another's company. Although Zoom works it's not ideal, so we look forward to the times when we can meet up again in person without restrictions or risk assessments etc. to enjoy our shared food together indoor, or

outdoors when the weather gets warmer. It is all part of community building which is so important in these times.

Joan Darbyshire

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## Dementia Friendly Meetings

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I have been very fortunate to be part of the recently formed group “Quaker Voices on Mental Health”, ([quakermhfund.uk](http://quakermhfund.uk)), supported by the Quaker Mental Health Fund. I belong to a sub-group “Dementia Friendly Meetings”. We encourage Meetings to consider how they can become more dementia friendly – especially as so many of us are ageing. My interest came from the lived experience of a father-in-law with dementia with Lewy Bodies and a very much-loved mother-in-law who lived the later years of her life with Alzheimer’s’ disease (two of the most common forms of dementia).

BYM have recently published a booklet “[Dementia in our Meetings](#)”, which talks about the experience of being together in a Quaker community when dementia is present. It uses the contributions given at the Quaker Mental Health Forum ‘Dementia: our shared journey’ in December 2017 and offers some queries for reflection.

More recently, and with many thanks to Horfield Meeting in Bristol who initially adapted it from a Churches Together pack to make it more appropriate for Quaker use, we have supported the publication of the ‘Becoming a Dementia Friendly Meeting Audit Pack’. We have this available for any meeting to use to assess how it may become more welcoming and inclusive for people with dementia, and I can guide you through it. It is very simple to use and useful for looking at a range of access issues that go well beyond dementia.

I have recently completed training to enable me to offer “Becoming a Dementia Friend” sessions for the Alzheimer’s Society and would be very willing to provide a session for any LM interested.

Erica Thomas  
Swansea

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## Silent Vigil, Senedd Building, Cardiff

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COP26 focussed a lot of attention onto the overridingly important issue of our time: the climate crisis and climate justice. South Wales Area Meeting (SWAM) established the Environment and Sustainability Cluster (ESC) as part of its response to the need, in Wales, to maintain a high level of public awareness, and to hold members of the Welsh Assembly in the light, regarding this crisis, after COP26. The ESC is tasked to advise SWAM on climate change issues and to take the initiative in implementing actions in furtherance of the aims mentioned above.

The silent vigil is planned to be held monthly, for one hour on a Friday afternoon, with the objective of keeping the issues very much in the public domain and reminding Welsh Assembly members of the need to take urgent action to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis.

On this, the first of our planned silent vigils outside of the Senedd at Cardiff Bay, the sun shone all day from a cloudless blue sky. After previous days of cloud, gloom, and fog, this in itself, provided a positive and up-lifting back-drop to the whole day: a good omen.

A dozen of us gathered. A banner had been prepared and was attached to railings behind where we congregated and sat in a circle underneath the large awning that shelters the area in front of the Senedd building. We planned to sit in silence for an hour.

For me this proved to be a powerfully moving experience.

I practice mindfulness meditation. As I settled into what I quickly realised was a heaven-sent opportunity to practice my mindfulness meditation skills, I focussed on my breathing, brought my attention

to the present moment, and luxuriated in the sensations that all my senses were soaking up. Three things stood out, however.

Firstly, the warmth of the sun on my face was SO welcome and SO relaxing. The Senedd steps face south-west. The sun was shining straight at us as we sat on those steps.

Secondly, the sound of a saxophone, played by a very talented busker about fifty yards from where we were sitting, cut through the general back-ground melee of noise. He played songs from the American songbook e.g. ‘You can’t take that away from me’ in a beautiful slow, bluesy, style. When he played ‘Danny Boy’ I could hear my mother’s voice singing one of her favourite songs.

And thirdly, about fifteen minutes after we had been sitting, a trio of mums, all wearing hijabs, arrived with a dozen or so children. They sat on the steps below us, to our left. While they talked together their children played joyfully on the spacious area in front of the Senedd building, chasing each other, riding bikes, and roller blades, and generally having a great time.





As I continued to sit, I reflected on the significance of what I was experiencing, particularly in the context of the silent vigil: The sunshine I took to symbolise the natural beauty of this world, as well as being a potent reminder that this warmth on a January day could portend climate catastrophe in the not-too-distant future.

The saxophone's sublime tone spoke to me of the creative skills and abilities we humans possess, skills that can be used to enhance our lives, or destroy our planet, our choice.

And the sounds of the children playing reminded me powerfully that their future is what is threatened by the climate crisis, it is they, and my grandchildren, who will have to cope with the consequences of climate catastrophe, and that is why I was sitting there, very definitely, doing a little bit to try to prevent this catastrophe.

For a colleague sitting in the circle, the children not being at school suggested to her that maybe they and their families were asylum seekers awaiting Home Office 'approval.' This in turn led her to link this to the devastating effect that climate change is already having on countries in Africa and Asia and that in the future the migration of millions of people can be expected if climate warming is not halted.

Doing something, however apparently insignificant (my daughter's response when I told her I would be sitting in silence was 'What on earth good is that going to do?') is better than doing nothing. Sitting silently for an hour with like-minded companions had been inspirational. And, for others, getting out in nature and taking action, as recommended in a 'Being Quaker, Living Quaker' talk recently, helped them manage the symptoms of climate anxiety that they – indeed all of us – are experiencing.

But then, we Quakers are very aware of that, are we not? And this small action is one of thousands of similar small actions being taken

by people across the world. And small seeds have the potential to grow into mighty trees, have they not?

This first vigil was by way of a trial run. We have learnt lessons and we will adapt things as we proceed. But proceed we certainly will. If you would like to join us, then the second Friday of the month is the day, the Senedd is the place, the time 2.00 – 3.00.

The next vigil: April 8th.

Alan Armstrong  
Environment and Sustainability Cluster  
Silent Vigil, Senedd Building, Cardiff, Friday 14th January 2022

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# Quakers in West Wales Asylum Concern

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## *History*

Towards the end of September 2020, we heard that 200 odd young male asylum seekers were already being placed in Penally Army Training Camp near Tenby in the south of Pembrokeshire, an entirely inappropriate placement, especially in the run up to winter, in the middle of a pandemic. Many of them would have had not only the trauma of leaving their home countries, with very often extremely difficult and dangerous journeys, but the additional vulnerability of being victims of torture, persecution, imprisonment, or trafficking, with the accompanying mental health problems. Such men were not screened out as claimed by the Home Office, and not all the residents were young.

A group emerged from the four Meetings of West Wales: St David's, Milford Haven, Narberth and Lampeter who gathered on zoom to see what our response should be to the situation. Links were established between the emerging organisation, County of Sanctuary Pembrokeshire (CoSP ) and various other local initiatives in support of the men.

Our remit clarified and developed over the time that the camp was open:

- To support each other in individual actions
- To act collectively where appropriate
- To take on the wider remit as outlined in the commitment for being a Sanctuary Meeting

Becoming a Sanctuary Group as part of BYM Sanctuary Everywhere initiative: QWWAC works on behalf of Milford Haven LM, Narberth

LM, St. David's LM and Fishguard & Goodwick Worship Group and alongside Lampeter LM, which is already a Sanctuary Meeting

### *Initial actions*

Supporting the men in the camp in whatever way we could, as individuals or collectively: this was largely in practical ways through donations of items or money to the various existing local support organisations. Some members of the group signed up as buddies, TEFL teachers, Sanctuary Day volunteers. We had pretty well everything in place to run our own Sanctuary Day back in October 2020, but Covid and transport issues prevented us from going ahead. The venue belonging to one of Milford Haven attenders who made the space available for a trip out for some of the men from Penally organised by another support group. Friends from Haverfordwest still very kindly provided a delicious hot meal, much enjoyed by the men and supporters.

Other national networks: We are signed up as a group to StatusNow4All and Detention Forum. Individuals in the group are involved in Craftism, Detention Forum, Refugee Tales, All Party Parliamentary Group/s. Members of the group are strongly encouraged to sign up to QARN Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network and receive the many very useful communications from that network. Some are in addition signed up to SWARM (Swansea Asylum and Refugee Matters) a network which also disseminates some very useful information which is then passed on as necessary.

We have had representation on the Medico Legal Consortium which conducted vulnerability assessments in the camp. This is a national network including people from: Forrest, Helen Bamber Foundation, Freedom from Torture, Medact, Medical Justice, Doctors of the World. Our contacts have been primarily with the first two groups via a Quaker contact from Southern Marches, who has also attended

several of our QWWAC meetings and stays in touch via our mail-outs.

### *Local initiatives*

One of our members is now a member of the core group of County of Sanctuary Pembrokeshire. We have good communications with Grwp (formerly The Rhywdwaith or Resilience Group Pembrokeshire). Some members attend the Penally FAN (Friends and Neighbours) group, and two members have also done the FAN facilitator training.

Campaigning to change the system: Letters have been sent to MPs, Members of Senedd, regulatory bodies (HM Inspectors of Prisons and HM Inspectors of Borders and Immigrations), Care Quality Commission, Public Health Wales, and local government bodies such as planners, public health, in respect of Penally Camp specifically but also campaigning on the overall issue of our very hostile British immigration system. Members of the group have written to their MPs to get the camps and barracks closed, in support of a number of Early Day Motions, or of StatusNow4All and other issues to do with the wider immigration system. Several people have made submissions to various government consultation processes or to the inspectorates and APPG request for submissions. There are a number of members who worked with the Craftism initiative to get the message across, which has included sending beautifully crafted butterflies with messages to the Home Secretary Priti Patel and Directors of Clearsprings Ready Homes which is the company which had the Home Office contract for running the camp at Penally.

Networking: This is an important part of the campaign to change an inhumane immigration system. Quaker networks, both local and nationally, have been significant. Via our connections with QARN, County of Sanctuary Pembrokeshire, the Medico legal consortium,

Grwp, and personal contacts with men from the camp, we have had direct and indirect contacts with members of Camp Residents of Penally: CROP (and subsequently with CRON from Napier Barracks). CROP was set up within the camp in the very early days, with the support of the various voluntary groups outside the camp. CROP set up English lessons within the camp, art and music, they mediated between residents and Clearsprings managers, organised the men who were to go out on day trips out, either for Sanctuary Days with CoSP or volunteer days, and made referrals and set up the IT and the space for the medico legal consortium doctors to do the vulnerability assessments. They worked with CoSP for the set-up of a bike bank, and even a gym facility within the camp. Even though many of the original CROP members were being moved on, there always seemed to be more men willing to step in. Some of the men moved out of the camp remained very involved as most meetings happen via zoom. They were able to communicate directly with the inspectorate for the inspections by HMI Prisons, and HMI Borders and Immigration, APPG inquiries, the Medico Legal Consortium. Some of these connections were facilitated in the first instance via Quaker networks.

### *Since the closure of the camp*

As a result of campaigning by many, many groups and individuals, Local Councils and local Councillors and a great many statutory bodies in Wales, including the Senedd, the camp was finally closed in March 2021. QWWAC has however wanted to continue meeting and continue some of the campaigning and support work, even though the men we had got to know had been moved on. Many went to Cardiff, some to Swansea and others to London and elsewhere.

Many of the QWWAC group were able to go to an exhibition of some of the men's amazing and very moving artwork organised before Christmas 2021 at The Torch Theatre Milford Haven. Milford Haven Meeting House was made available for supporters and for those men

who made the trip back to Pembrokeshire for the opening of the exhibition and to see the very moving and thought-provoking play *Angel* set in Kurdish Syria.

In addition to ongoing contacts with some of the men from Penally, several of the group have been supporting settled refugees in Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion or Carmarthenshire, either through attending the Friends and Neighbours (FAN) group, or directly in person and by telephone giving significant and ongoing support to two Kurdish Syrian families in Lampeter and one family in Carmarthen. This has been very enriching for those involved as well as giving practical and emotional support to these amazing and very hospitable people.

We are left with big questions in our minds. We are a small group, many of us already overcommitted in our lives and/or no longer as young, or as well, as we would like to be. How can we work with our constituent local meetings, with the wider Quaker Community, or indeed beyond Quaker circles? After hearing the shocking evidence of Napier Camp presented at a recent APPG meeting, or indeed the appalling and heartless reception of vulnerable people crossing the dangerous waters of the channel, how do we address this cruel inhumanity committed in our name. Napier was opened at the same time as Penally but has remained open despite a very damning inspectors report, a high court ruling and subsequent investigations by the All Party Political Group focussing on Quasi Detention Centres such as Napier, we are moved to ask what are we called to do? The government is planning a great many more such centres, which are the last place any asylum seeker should be placed.

### *Relevant articles:*

New “Reception Centres” which are not reception centres but rather detention centres by another name.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/14/refugee-group-warns-of-astonishing-cost-of-new-home-office-policies>.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/13/asylum-seekers-crossing-channel-face-inhumane-treatment-observers-say>.  
*This article is over a year old.*

Has anything changed more than one year on?

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/14/two-thirds-of-uk-asylum-seekers-on-small-boats-had-hypothermia-or-injuries>

And how will it read once the new Borders and Immigration Bill has become law?

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/14/two-thirds-of-uk-asylum-seekers-on-small-boats-had-hypothermia-or-injuries>



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## Working Towards Anti-Racism

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On Sunday the 21st of November 2021, Jane Tooby and Tomos Williams offered their experiences of “Working towards Anti-Racism” to Cardiff Meeting.

During 2021, we were part of a group of six Friends working through Layla Saad’s book “*Me and White Supremacy*”.

The group grew from the South Wales Area Meeting (SWAM) “Being Quaker, Living Quaker - Black Lives Matter” day. By November, we decided to share a summary of our experiences, prompted partly by the minutes on diversity and inclusion at last year’s Yearly Meeting Gathering and partly by wishing to take what we have learnt out into the world, hoping that it will help others.

We presented our thoughts and feelings by asking each other a short series of questions. Here’s a summary of our answers.

### *Why did you start this process?*

*Tomos: After the killing of George Floyd, I felt very defensive and really wasn’t engaging with what was going on. I soon realised that it was too important to ignore and that, whatever it felt like, I needed to understand more about the issues and more about my responses to them.*

*Jane: I too was affected by the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement.*

*There was public outrage, but I wondered how long this would last. I was aware that people were appalled by the death of the little Syrian boy who was found on a beach – for a few months there was interest in asylum seekers and collections for the camps in Calais and then very little action. I didn’t want the same to happen to BLM. I needed to engage more.*

*How does it feel now compared to when we started in March?*

*J: It was a difficult process and I think we all felt very uncomfortable at times. However, I am continually reminded of James Baldwin's words: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced".*

*T: I still feel defensive, but I am engaging anyway. I have recognised my defensiveness as part of the conditioning which I, which all of us, have been subject to for the whole of our lives. It feels important to see that for what it is and to be able to move on anyway, to "feel the fear and do it anyway".*

*Did it make a difference being in the company of other Quakers?*

*J: Layla Saad suggested we adopt a method for addressing the questions she posed that is very similar to Creative Listening with which we were all familiar. Over the weeks our trust deepened, and we could be honest about things we found uncomfortable. The questions we were asked by Saad in the book were very searching. There was nowhere to hide.*

*T: I'm sure it would have been difficult in any group. I am quite good at performing and, on Zoom that's even easier. I think that being with a group of Quakers meant that there was a basis of trust which meant that we could allow ourselves to be more vulnerable.*

*What are the main lessons for you?*

*T: There are so many that it's difficult to pick one or two. I think that one of the main lessons is beginning to understand the extent to which I benefit from being white. It's not just about the big, important moments in life. It's also about walking down the street, going into shops, turning on the television or the radio. Once you start to learn about the ways that people of colour experience those day-to-day things, it's shocking the privilege we take for granted.*

*The second thing is something to do with humility. Part of my conditioning is an expectation that I will “get it right”. I am learning that the important thing is to try. There will be times when I get it wrong but, as long as I can see that and learn from it, and as long as I keep going back and trying again, that’s okay.*

*J: I had not explicitly thought of myself as a white person. I have spent many years working with people of colour and hadn’t really explored my own whiteness. Race is a social construct and in relation to this we discussed how a pale skin is often regarded as superior, more valuable, more deserving, and more powerful. Much of this goes back to the history of slavery and colonisation. This situation actively harms those who are not white.*

*I also examined what I understood by racism and anti-racism. Being anti-racist isn’t thinking that one isn’t racist (without truly examining what racism is) and feeling satisfied with that. It’s about being proactive.*

*Have there been any big surprises or revelations?*

*T: I think a surprise for several of us in the group was to actively realise that we are white. That sounds odd but we talk so much about race in terms of “the other” - black, Asian, ethnic minorities, indigenous, Romani and so on - that we just don’t notice and just don’t give any thought to the fact that we are white. We are taught from the very beginning that white is normal and white is good, that the problem is elsewhere.*

*The second big surprise was to begin to learn about the involvement of Quakers in the transatlantic slave trade. Most of the time, if they talked about it at all, the majority of early Quakers tended to talk about treating your slaves well and not about not owning slaves. We tend to think of ourselves as “good people” and that the bad people are somewhere else. It has been a revelation to discover that the Religious Society of Friends is as embedded in racism and white supremacy as anybody else.*

J: *I was shocked when reading Martin Luther King's words 'In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends'. He couldn't understand those liberals who agreed with him but didn't do anything to change it. I thought – is this me?*

*I was confused at one stage by the concept of good intentions. I feel I have good intentions but is this enough? I was struck by the thoughts of Mark Russ who did an introductory talk for YMG and wrote an article in Friends Quarterly 'Why do you call me good?' This discusses racism amongst Quakers. In it he quotes from the Epistle of Black, white, Asian and mixed-heritage Friends: 'No harm is meant by it. Harm may be done but it is never meant'.*

We have put together a short list of resources we have found useful. If you would like to receive this, please email either of us (contact details in the Members & Attenders book or contact the Hedyn Editors to pass a message to Jane or Tomos).

Jane Tooby and Tomos Williams  
Cardiff Meeting

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## Whatever Next?

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By the time that you read this, it will probably be two years since I went to my last pre-pandemic Meeting for Worship. I remember it well. There had already been discussions on restrictions and regulations, but when I saw the doorkeeper wearing a glove, I assumed that it must be okay to shake her hand. However, she told me that she was going to give me a 'Namaste' greeting instead and so I hurried into the meeting room and felt foolish for my error.

Waiting for Meeting for Worship to start nearly two years later, I reflected on how I have missed that simple act of shaking hands. It always meant both welcome and equality to me. Indeed, at the end of a rather fractious discussion group at a Quaker conference (well, as fractious as a Quaker discussion group can get), I remember realising how that simple act of shaking someone's hand restored a connection and stated a basic equality that cannot be achieved in any other greeting. This seemed something very much in keeping with Quaker thought, which a bowed head or a wave did not have.

In the last two years, I have seen things change in the meeting house too, of course. At first there were no meetings at all, then there was yellow tape on the floor that looked a little like the police had been in after a strange crime and this was followed by white 'x' marks that indicated buried treasure one metre apart. Finally, I write this on a day when all the tape has disappeared from the floor in anticipation of a relaxation of the rules (though we all still sit apart, of course).

I am being slightly flippant about the tape, but I do genuinely have admiration for those who went in to measure and mark where we could sit. They are the unsung heroes of keeping Quaker meetings going during the pandemic ... at least in person. Of course, we emerge

from the pandemic with a whole new set of meetings - Zoom Meeting for Worship (ZMfW?).

I will admit that I have never found Zoom to be an effective form of collective worship and, after a few attempts, returned to finding the need for a physical gathering. However, along with those who noted that they enjoyed ZMfW, I saw new faces joining and people whose only experience of Quakers has been online. In addition, this morning at the meeting house I saw people who have only known a form of Quaker worship without close contact, handshakes, mugs of tea and a chat after worship. The question has to be - as restrictions are lifted, will we ever go back to what we were and, if we do not go back, what will we have lost or gained?

A friend of mine once heard me say that 'Quakers do not have communion' and corrected me to say that when we met for tea, coffee, and biscuits after worship, that was our communion. At the time I had not considered that, but I do agree that sharing from one kitchen has a certain way of building a community. Although standing around in the rain outside the building has formed a slightly similar experience recently, the joy of the communal kitchen was that everyone had a chance to talk, and that the nervous newcomer might be gently introduced to someone who could answer their questions.

How do we cope with having two meetings now - one physical and one Zoom? It seems unlikely that ZMfW will stop and why should it when it draws in new worshippers and those who cannot make it to a physical meeting? How do we ensure that we do not end up with two meetings in each location, neither knowing each other? Some meetings have experimented with 'blending' already and it may be that that will be our way forwards, though in what sense will the two parts of the meeting truly 'meet'?

I have no answer to any of these questions, but I do know when I will know that Quakers have made their way back to something

resembling what I was involved in before March 2020. That would be when once again we have a doorkeeper and someone whose hand you shake before going into the meeting room. I hope that enough fellow Quakers agree to ensure that one day it happens again, whatever meetings look like.

David Heald  
Cardiff Meeting

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# Credits

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Front Cover: [Svitlanaozirna](#) - [Deposit Photos](#)

*Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the editorial team or of South Wales Area Meeting, and the magazine is in no way liable for any such opinions. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the contents of this issue are accurate, we cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies or late changes.*



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