

Easter Settlement at Cober Hill, 2024

'Please write something about the weekend,' someone said; and I thought I would, but then found I couldn't. The words that arrived weren't saying what I'd expected; other words said more: and these were coming from a place of thankfulness to everyone over the Easter weekend at Cober Hill.

Right from the very start, Friends joined-in, helping to organise things and making suggestions, their keen participation making the weekend what it became. This felt such a blessing, and a vital part of a deeply enriching experience. Our guest speaker, Ben Wood, played an invaluable role in all of this, bringing great erudition across a vast wealth of areas of deep knowledge and literatures, communicated with a ready openness and an 'at-ease-ness' when sharing ideas and perspectives, wrapped-up with an engaging and unfailing sense of humour and jolly good spirits. Ben brought tremendous insights, and enabled a welcome continuity to the whole weekend of exploration.

The venue, it should be added, also played its part: the proximity of the sea and the countryside providing their own distinctive and nourishing backdrop. The attention and service from the staff at Cober Hill was unfailingly efficient, friendly and excellent, and if food portions exceeded expectations, so too did the weather over Easter. One particular sunrise above a gently rippling sea was simply quite spectacular, and humbling in a unique way. Let there be Light, indeed.

And so to the main theme, 'Hope: seeing Light in the Darkness'; this inevitably became our chief focus, but this engagement and exploration helpfully covered a range of styles, including formal presentations, small-group discussions, practical art using hard-boiled eggs (I know!) to transmute ideas and to develop themes into imaginative physical manifestations; and in meeting a deadline to produce the content for a very special edition: *the Hopeful Friend*. A publication not to be missed!

Easter Sunday had been heralded with Easter Hymns, and an Easter Egg Hunt, in which we were joined by the children and young people from the Link Group. Jo Baynham, Youth Development Worker for Quakers in Yorkshire, had organised this event to run alongside Easter Settlement this year, providing a couple of night's stay at Scarborough Meeting House. The youngsters brought much liveliness and energy; we were happy to at least provide the Easter Eggs...

Also running alongside the main programme at Easter Settlement was a cornucopia of delights to be had pursuing a wide-range of activities: from walking to wood-block printing; 'sleuthing' to needlework of various kinds, including knitting and crochet; and Tai Chi for the early-birds. Dancing in the main hall on Saturday evening proved its usual triumph of joyous determination over finesse (and a re-defining of the verb to count) and was of course great fun; circle-dancing was more reflective and spiritual, but, as ever, showed the strength and power of true gentleness. We were blessed to have such activities so skillfully facilitated. A whole array of talents were on display, and enjoyed by all, on Sunday evening: from various clapping and singing 'rounds', to poetry and music and expressive dance, and thought-provoking readings, too. And on and on; and onwards and inwards, the weekend ran its course. As have (almost) these words of thankfulness, and hope.

Completing a Jigsaw of Hopes

There was hope in gathering
and hope in shared meals;
hope in greetings,
in laughter and dance;

hope analysed, considered,
accepted and lost;
hope renewed loudly,
and despaired of in pain.

There was hope of past Friends,
deeply different; intense:
hope in the present,
and of that yet to come;

a spectrum of Faith,
voiced from depths of belief,
of a way of life, quite ours,
to be known by like means:

of faithfulness, somehow,
in the ways that we can:
each taking their place
in this fabric of Life;

where inner becomes outer,
worlds entangled anew;
our testimonies restored,
to address needs here, now:

living out hopes,
inspired by Love,
as early Quakers found,
and we can, and do, too.