



## The Oldham Peace Times

Issue 20 – July 2019

News from the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum

### Editorial

Dear Friends, Welcome to this twentieth issue of the Oldham Peace Times, newsletter of the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum. This is a regular publication to inform people and organisations with an interest in working for peace about the Forum and its work.

So summer is finally upon us and you can see here a lovely summery photo of me by the peace pole in Kendal (thanks to Maria Ellis).

I have to report that this will be the last issue of the Oldham Peace Times *for now*. As many of you know I have been studying for over two years with the Peace Studies Department at the University of Bradford.

In year three, I get to study in Australia for a semester, and next year in Europe, before returning to Bradford for the final year.

The Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum has now been in existence for 3 ½ years. It's been both an enjoyable and an inspirational journey so far. So please don't go away. This is only a temporary break in this publication - we will be right back when circumstances permit.

I shall continue to post on our Facebook page any news about the many peaceful things I intend to get up to in Australia, starting with another visit to the Peace Boat in Brisbane Harbour on 18 July.

In the meantime, may the contents of this newsletter inspire you to continue to work for peace wherever you may be and you can continue to contact me via the email below!

Bye for now,

**Richard Outram, Editor**

Email: [richardoutram35@gmail.com](mailto:richardoutram35@gmail.com)

Facebook: TheOldhamPledgeToPeaceForum



## Contents

Page 2	- An Introduction to the Pledge to Peace
Page 3	- A Personal Account of Protest at Westminster Abbey
Page 5	- Images of Peace from Northern Ireland
Page 10	- Two Years On, Alexandra Park remembers the Victims of the Manchester Arena Bombing
Page 11	- Finding Peace at Conishead Priory
Page 12	- A Rose for Peace
Page 14	- With the Lord Buddha in Battersea
Page 15	- Ringing for Peace with Yoko Ono
Page 16	- Find Your Number, Send Yourself a Message says Prem Rawat
Page 18	- Peace is Possible

## An Introduction to the Pledge to Peace

The Pledge to Peace initiative, also called the Bruxelles Declaration, was established on November 28, 2011 at the European Parliament in Brussels. The initiative came from then First Vice President of the European Parliament, Mr. Gianni Pittella MEP, the former President of the European Parliament Senator Emilio Colombo, and the Italian peace group, the Associazione Percorsi. The Pledge to Peace was sponsored by Mr. Prem Rawat, an authoritative international speaker on peace, who was the first signatory (**below**) and became the 'Ambassador to the Bruxelles Declaration - Pledge to Peace'.



Signatories help create a 'culture of peace' in their communities and submit an annual report to the Secretariat, the Percorsi Association, by the UN International Day of Peace, 21<sup>st</sup> September.

More information about the Pledge can be found at: <http://www.pledgetopeace.eu/> and <http://www.associazionepercorsi.com> and about the Ambassador to the Bruxelles Declaration – Pledge to Peace, Mr. Prem Rawat, can be found at: <http://www.timelesstoday.com> , <http://www.premrawat.com> and <http://www.wopg.org>

**Article and photo courtesy of the Percorsi Association**



## A Personal Account of Protest at Westminster Abbey by Catherine Jones

I knew that I would be outside Westminster Abbey protesting as soon as I heard that the Ministry of Defence was hosting a National Service of Thanksgiving in the Abbey on 3 May 2019 to mark 50 years of what they called 'the continuous at sea deterrent'. At sea deterrent? Better known as Britain's nuclear armed Trident submarines.

Why was I so sure that I was going? Because the idea of this National Service of Thanksgiving was just so abhorrent to me both as a citizen who wants to see the abolition of nuclear weapons and also as a Christian who cannot reconcile the death and destruction that would result from the use of Trident's nuclear weapons with the love of neighbour and of creation that Christianity teaches. With my Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) badge pinned to my rucksack, I travelled down to London by train. Changing at Embankment for Westminster, just before the tube doors closed, a lady asked me if the train went to Westminster. She and her husband jumped on and stood behind me. You didn't need to be Sherlock Holmes to spot the clues that made me sure they were attending the Abbey as part of the congregation. My badge would have told them why I was going! I followed them towards the Abbey before I found a great position, immediately across the road from Westminster Abbey's main doors.



The policemen standing facing us on the central reservation did not look like top anti-terrorist officers but I knew high level security must be in place somewhere. I caught one glimpse of four very tough looking soldiers as they relocated shortly before the service.

Then the Dean came out to greet Prince William and demonstrators chanted 'shame on you'.

Beside me other demonstrators started the die-in (**left**), laying on the pavement to represent the millions of people who would be killed by the use of nuclear weapons.

Why didn't I lie down? Partly because I wanted to stand-up and be seen and partly because getting up again would have been a tricky process nowadays!

While the service was on I talked to the people standing alongside me, one being Rachel who I volunteer with in Oldham; she had gone down a few days earlier.

The others I met were all from London or the south east, some of them were very seasoned demonstrators because of course so many actions take place in the capital. I find talking to others at demonstrations is always encouraging and helps renew my personal commitment.

I found that what happened next was the most disheartening part of the event.

The Abbey doors opened and people started to file out and to cross the road to the Queen Elizabeth II Centre for a reception.

Many men of course wore full dress uniform. The women were dressed in the sort of outfits and big hats that I usually associate with weddings. They were dressed for a celebration.

As the Abbey doors opened, the demonstrators started to shout but their voices were soon drowned out by the loud and joyful peeling of the Abbey bells.

The congregation filed across the road for a long time. Clearly there were many more of them than there were of us. At this point I decided that dignified silence was the only option and simply stood still, holding a placard - just the basic CND motif.

Finally, Prince William and the Dean left the Abbey and once they had crossed into the QE2 Centre the bells fell silent. I read later there were about 2000 Abbey attendees and 500 protestors.

Was it worth going? After what I have just said, maybe surprisingly, the answer is a strong "Yes". Why? Because the media gave a lot of publicity to the protest. Instead of the news focusing on a national celebration the counter views were publicised including whether the £205 billion projected cost of Trident replacement might be better spent on addressing major issues like the climate emergency or funding for our NHS.



**Left** Cath shown in red with her CND placard

**Thanks are due to Catherine Jones for this article and Rachel for the first photo**



## Images of Peace from Northern Ireland

In mid-May, Forum Secretary Richard Outram visited Belfast and London/Derry in Northern Ireland with fellow students from the Peace Studies Department at the University of Bradford. This study tour was researching the progress made in peacebuilding since the signing of the historic Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998. Many tourists now visit Northern Ireland to see the sites connected to the television series Game of Thrones or the Titanic disaster, but Richard chose instead to photograph some images related to peace that you may not have seen before.



**Above Left:** The so-called 'Peace Wall' along Cupar Way, which divides the Protestant Shankill Road and Catholic Falls Road communities of West Belfast. This is now a tourist attraction, being visited by parties transported in black cabs.

Historically, this interface, where the two communities meet, was a site of intercommunal, paramilitary and state violence. Although some 'Peace Walls' were built at the start of the Troubles, sadly more have been built after the Good Friday Peace Agreement than before it, and there are no plans to remove them until 2028. There are now 88 'Peace Walls', which can be up to 15 metres high. During the day, there are gates opened between the two communities, but these are still closed at night.

**Above Right:** It is now a tradition that visitors write on the wall their hopes for peace in Northern Ireland.







**Left above and below:** 'The Past – The Now – The Future', off the Newtownards Road, Protestant East Belfast. It was painted by young and old people from the local community, as part of the 'Communities Moving Forwards Re-imaging Programme'.

An initiative of Belfast City Council, Charter NI and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, this replaces former paramilitary displays with murals which are more hopeful. This represents the transitional process of a city moving from conflict to peace and a better future.



**Below left:** Thanksgiving Square, which is by the river in Belfast City Centre.

For readers who attended, this is a few minutes walk from the venue where the Ambassador to the Pledge to Peace, Mr Prem Rawat, spoke as part of his 2017 UK events programme.

**Below right:** An explanation of the installation – the last sentence seems remarkably attuned with the message that Prem Rawat might himself have given to his Belfast audience in 2017.

## THANKSGIVING SQUARE BELFAST

This female figure represents various allegorical themes associated with hope and aspiration, peace and reconciliation and is derived from images from Classical and Celtic mythology. Her position on the globe signifies a unified approach to life on this earth. It encompasses oneness, while celebrating the diversity of culture that exists in our global village.

The aim of the sculpture is to bring people together and to change hearts and minds; to make bridges across the divides in our community. To work towards a peaceful, happy existence for everyone on this planet by respect for each other, their cultural heritages and all our aspirations.

This symbol creates a tangible first statement of our long term objective in bringing people together to foster a happy and fulfilling life for all and a sense of gratefulness for all that life has given us.





**Above Left:** 'The Peace Mural' in the Catholic Bogside Estate in Derry City.

This looks out over the site of the tragic Bloody Sunday shootings where on 30, January 1972, fourteen Catholics were shot and killed by British soldiers during a civil rights march.

Many see this event as the catalyst that ignited the Troubles, which lasted until the 1990s.

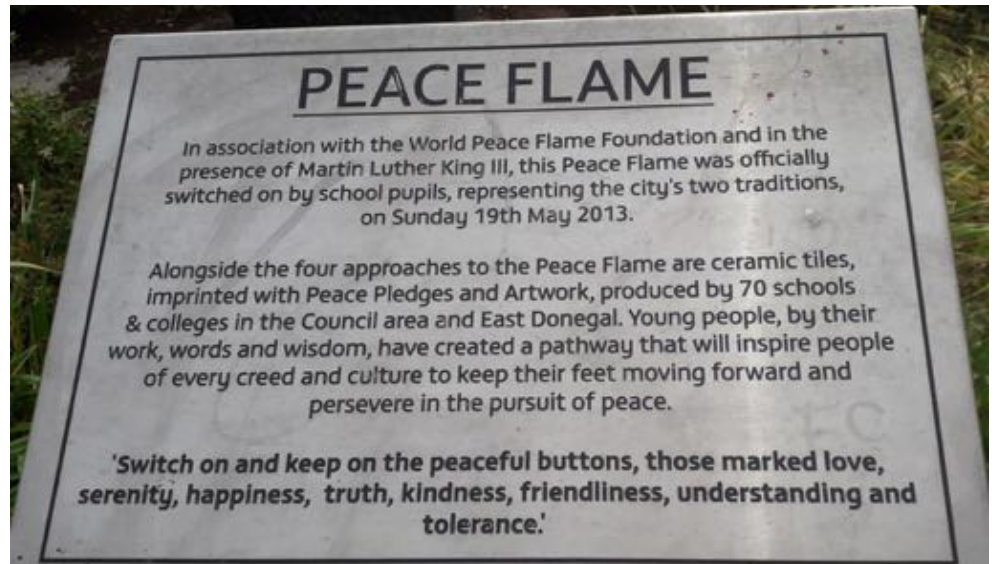
The mural was painted by the Bogside Artists in 2004. It depicts a dove with an oak leaf as the dove symbolises St Columba, the city's founder, who was said to have built his monastery in an oak grove. The colours of the mural are those of the spectrum and are meant to symbolise that peace without freedom is no peace at all.

**Above Right:** Even looking out from the city walls, the mural is imposing below. The city and its walls were originally built by apprentices and artisans from London, hence why historically it has been referred to as Londonderry, and still is by Protestants.





**Below:** The Peace Flame created to support reconciliation located in lovely gardens by the Guildhall and the river in the heart of the city.



**Left:** The iconic Peace Bridge was built to provide a direct link into the city centre for the Protestant communities, which were displaced across the river by the Troubles.

It is one of many infrastructure projects funded by the European Union, which has also invested heavily in peace-building programmes in support of the Good Friday peace process.



**All photos courtesy of Richard Outram**

9 The Oldham Peace Times - Issue 20 - July 2019

## Two Years On, Alexandra Park School remembers Manchester Arena Bomb

On May 22, at Alexandra Park Junior School, a signatory to the Pledge to Peace, commemorations were held to mark the second anniversary of the Manchester attack.

Samantha Nicholson-Hickling, PHSE Co-ordinator, explains what happened in school that day:

"We had a visitor from Oldham Council, Ellen, come to talk to our Year 5/6 children about radicalisation, to help prepare them for the world out there and how it has changed. Also, every child in school made, or contributed to, our bee display in the hall. We have 360 bees displayed in our school hall."

"Mrs Lynch, one of the school's administrators, then chose her favourite 22 bees which will be displayed in our school art gallery, as a memorial for the coming year."

"We are so proud of how our children were sensible and considerate during the commemorations. They all understood the importance of these commemorations, and why we must remember them, to make sure that a tragedy like this must never be repeated."



**Above left:** Year 5 pupils Zulaika, Subhan, Hany, Abbas and Hassan Abbas proudly show their bees whilst standing with Ellen from Oldham Council

**Above right:** Although shy at first, Hassan Abbas later showed himself from behind his bee.

Commenting on the events, Headteacher, Mrs Jenny Seabright said: "We marked the second anniversary of the Manchester Arena terror attack at Alexandra Park Junior School with the children decorating their own individual bees that were displayed in the school hall. The children sang their hearts out in our end of term 'Singing Square' surrounded by all the bees."

"We wanted the whole school community to pay their respects and remember the 22 people who lost their lives and those who were injured during the horrific attack. It is so important to come together and be united in harmony. Music and art are accessible ways of making this possible. There were so many creative and fantastic bees and many of them will be on display in the school's art gallery. We thank Mrs Hickling for organising both events".



**Below:** Mrs Seabright and Mrs Hickling (back) with children holding the selected 22 bees



## Finding Peace at Conishead Priory

In early June, Maria and Richard visited Conishead Priory with their friend Jo. Set in 70 acres of wooded grounds, the modern priory buildings are located just outside Ulverston, near the shore of Morecambe Bay. A priory was first established on the site in 1160, but in more recent years the site was occupied by a stately home which served for a time as a miners' convalescent home, before falling into disrepair. It was purchased in 1976 to become a Buddhist centre.

The site is now home to the first Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Centre and the Temple for World Peace **(below)**, which houses the largest Buddha statue cast in the west. It also houses the headquarters of the New Kadampa Tradition, an international non-profit organisation that supports the development of Kadampa Buddhism throughout the world. The movement was founded by the Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche (affectionately known as Geshe-la), a world-renowned meditation master who pioneered the introduction of modern Buddhism into contemporary society.



The centre offers a year-long programme of daily, weekly and weekend meditation classes, retreats, in-depth study programmes, and international meditation festivals. Tens of thousands of people visit the centre, each year on individual, group and educational visits, for example, the centre hosts many visits from scouting groups. There are around 100 people who are resident in the community, but it is also possible to be a short-term resident volunteer to experience life there.

After a vegetarian lunch in the World Peace Cafe, Maria was able to present books on Prem Rawat's life and message for the Educational Programme Co-ordinator at the centre, hoping that these would compliment the centre's work for world peace.

More information can be found at [manjushri.org](http://manjushri.org). The address is Conishead Priory, Priory Road, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 9QQ

*'Only by creating peace within our own mind and helping others do the same can we hope to achieve peace in this world'*

Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche

## A Rose for Peace

Forum Vice-Chair Maria Ellis went on a very special mission recently to select and collect a Peace Rose from rose specialists Fryers in Knutsford to be the centrepiece of our proposed new peace garden at Dunwood Park. As you can see **below** the box for the rose was almost as tall as Maria and the heavy package was a real struggle for her to transport by hand on the train and tram. Appropriately, founder Arthur Fryer started to grow roses commercially in 1912, the same year Dunwood Park opened. In 1928, the business relocated to its current site in Knutsford. Now part of the Blue Diamond Group, Fryer's grows over 200 varieties of roses and over the years has won many prestigious awards from all over the world (<https://www.fryersroses.co.uk/>)



**Above:** Maria holding the box containing the rose with Michelle and Louise



**Below:** Maria collecting the rose from Oliver Sherwin



The Peace Rose was first developed by a French rose breeder, Francis Meillard, between 1935 and 1939. When war with Germany appeared inevitable, Meillard sent cuttings of his rose to friends in Italy, Turkey, Germany and the USA. It is rumoured that cuttings were taken in the American diplomatic bag to the USA just before the German invasion of France in 1940.

Originally named after Monsieur Meillard's mother, the American rose grower Conrad Pyle Company commercially relaunched the variety on 29 April 1945 at Pasadena, California, with the symbolic release of two doves into the sky and a simple statement: 'We are persuaded that this greatest new rose of our time should be named for the world's greatest desire: 'peace'. Ironically, later that same day, Berlin, capital of Nazi Germany, fell to Soviet forces and a truce ending military hostilities was declared in Europe.

On May 8, 1945, when Nazi Germany formally surrendered, the 49 delegates who met in San Francisco to form the United Nations were each presented with a bloom of 'Peace' and a message of peace from the Secretary of the American Rose Society which read "We hope the 'Peace' Rose will influence men's thoughts for everlasting world peace". 'Peace' won an All-American Award for roses on the day that the war in Japan came to an end.

The Peace Rose is now the world's most popular and famous rose. It is our hope that this Peace Rose will influence the thoughts of any visitor to the peace garden towards 'everlasting world peace'.



**Right:** A peace rose at Conishead Priory

**Photos courtesy of Richard, Fryers and Maria Ellis**

## With the Lord Buddha in Battersea

In early July, Richard and Maria were in London and went to visit Battersea Park where there is a Buddhist Peace Pagoda on the south bank of the Thames. The pagoda has been in-situ since 1984 when the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Order offered it to the people of London during the Greater London Council Peace Year. Appropriately it was the last planning application approved by that body before its abolition by the then-Government.



Nipponzan Myohoji is a religious movement that emerged from the Nichiren sect of Japanese Buddhism. They have constructed Peace Pagodas around the world since 1947. The one in Battersea was built by monks, nuns and followers of the order at the behest of its founder, The Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii (1885–1985).

The double-roofed structure, which is 33.5 m high and constructed from concrete and wood, is one of around 80 around the world and the second to be erected in a Western capital city, the first being in Vienna in 1983. It followed the UK's first Peace Pagoda completed in Milton Keynes in 1980.

A Peace Pagoda is a Buddhist stupa, meaning 'heap', which contains Buddha's relics. The shape represents the Buddha's folded robes as a base upon which his upturned begging bowl and stick have been placed.

The Pagoda has four large gilded bronze sculptures of Buddha on each of its four sides showing some of the Buddha's mudras (hand gestures). The gestures performed by the hands of a Buddha image have specific meanings that refer to some event in the life or special characteristic of the Buddha.



The London Peace Pagoda is maintained by Wandsworth Borough Council and the Reverend Gyoro Nagase offers daily prayers there.

In June, an annual celebration at the Pagoda brings together Buddhists from all different traditions with other faiths to offer prayers for peace. On 9th August, Nagasaki Day, a Floating Lantern ceremony takes place at dusk to commemorate all victims of war.



## Ringling for Peace with Yoko Ono

The opening ceremony of the Manchester International Festival – 4 July - was attended this year by thousands of people ringing bells for peace. The event was orchestrated by renowned Japanese artist and peace campaigner Yoko Ono who appeared before the audience via a video link **(below)** to call upon participants to ring one of the 4,000 specially engraved copper bells that had been produced for peace or, for the 400 fortunate enough to have participated in a workshop before the event, to ring the personal bell that they had produced there.



Yoko Ono said to The Guardian before the event "I always wanted to do a bell piece [of] music, and I got a chance to do it, so I'm doing it."

"Whenever we win the war, we bring out our own bell to say, we won!" Instead the piece interpreted the resonant peal of bells as "a peaceful sound, and that's why it's desperately needed now".

**Left:** The event also provided an opportunity to meet up with old friends. Here Maria meets fellow clanger, Sean.

Maria came with two bells, one of which she made at a workshop before the event and the other one being very special as it was bought by her parents on their honeymoon.

After the bell-ringing, the event finished with a rousing rendition of Give Peace a Chance which continued long after the music ended.

Yoko Ono has always said that peace isn't just the absence of war. She believes that peace is a thing that you have to do together. On the 4 July, over 4,000 Mancunians made that peace together.

**Below left:** It was great to see Mahdlo, Oldham's youth hub, well-represented at the event with a posse of young people bearing bright yellow banners with uplifting slogans. (Mahdlo is Oldham spelt backwards.)

Mahdlo hosted one of ten workshops where ceramic bells were especially crafted for the event.

**Below right:** Maria participated with Ann-Marie from Mahdlo at that bell-making event and was very pleased to share a banner for peace.



The Yoko Ono's Bells for Peace event was broadcast live on the festival web site here (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/events/exz3v2/live/cgrp5v>) and should still be available on BBC iPlayer.

## **Find Your Number, Send Yourself a Message, says Prem Rawat**

Manchester played host to a second outstanding peace activist in the last week, as Global Peace Ambassador Prem Rawat spoke to a packed hall of thousands at Manchester Central on Sunday 7 July.

Mr Rawat was also one of the primary sponsors of, and first signatory to, the Pledge to Peace and was later appointed the Ambassador to the Pledge to Peace.

Mr Rawat urged his audience to become more self-aware and to "find your number and send yourself a message" to remind yourself of the blessings that we all have by virtue of being alive and to "be thankful, be content and to be in clarity". Prem asked everyone if they had the necessary email addresses ending dot.heart and dot.wisdom to do this? He also spoke of the need for us all to replicate the actions of the fan clubs in team sports and to cheer for "Team Me".



Prem had three suggestions that he felt audience members might want to take up – to gather knowledge but also garner wisdom; to know yourself; and to avoid distractions. Prem spoke from his experience that, as a trained pilot, it would be inadvisable for him to know about the flight checklist, and yet not employ the wisdom to follow it prior to commencing his or her flight. He also referred to the Greek philosopher Socrates who urged people to “know thyself” and the Indian mystic poet Kabir who warned of the danger of becoming distracted from the self.

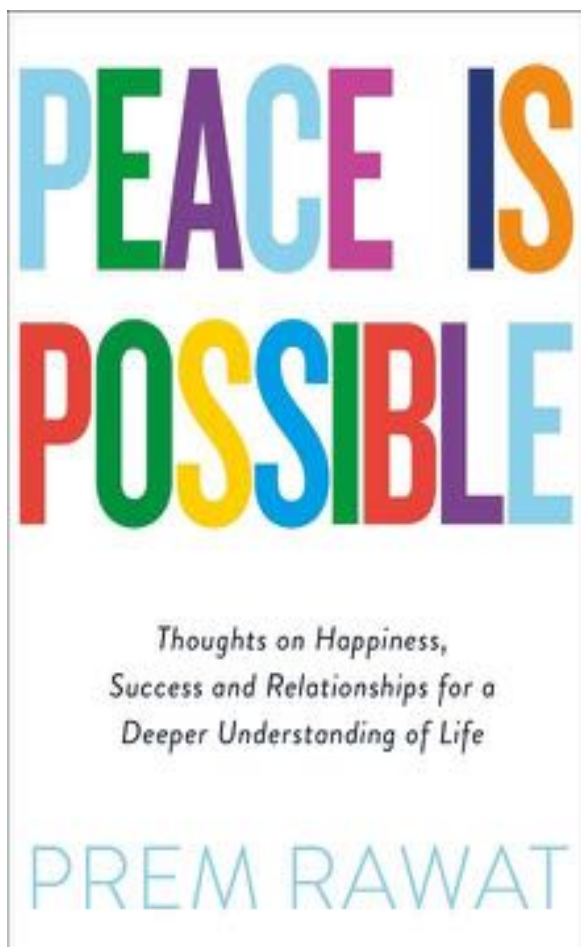


**Above:** Prem Rawat speaking at Manchester. **Below:** The audience awaits the start of the event.



**Top photo courtesy of Timeless Today**

17 The Oldham Peace Times - Issue 20 - July 2019



The Manchester event also represented one of a number of events where the audience was introduced to Prem's new book, *Peace is Possible*.

Here is the introduction to the book by publishers, Penguin. 'Global peace ambassador Prem Rawat has spent his entire life travelling the world to deliver one timeless message: **Peace is Possible**.

Conflict, he explains, takes place at three levels: between countries, between people, and finally within each of us as individuals. These levels are all interconnected. Hence the conflict that rages within a person will lead them to seek out conflict with another. Similarly, conflict between people of one nation is likely to result in conflict between many nations. So the first step to world peace is a simple one: we must first find peace within ourselves.

*Peace is Possible* draws together age-old stories which, as they have been passed down over generations, inspired and transformed the lives of millions. From the power of adaptability, to the importance of trust, to the sticking-place of courage, these are the messages that will change the world. For good.'



**Left:** Here we are at the event doing our own promotion of the book with our friends Roger, Pinky, Raj and Kieran. Not forgetting Joe who took the photo.

The book is available from Penguin

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/312/31279/peace-is-possible/9780241385449.html>