

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bull Street Meeting House and online on 28 January 2023

2023.001 Opening worship

We have started our meeting with a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of our Friends Marian Singles, (SOL) 21 November 2022, aged 90; Marcus Marcussen, (COT), Tenbury Wells, 27 October 2022, aged 99; and Francis Rowland Dale, (SEL), 8 January 2023 aged 88. We also heard *Quaker Faith & Practice?* 3.05 as follows:

The right conduct of our meetings for church affairs depends upon all coming to them in an active, seeking spirit, not with minds already made up on a particular course of action, determined to push this through at all costs. But open minds are not empty minds, nor uncritically receptive: the service of the meeting calls for knowledge of facts, often painstakingly acquired, and the ability to estimate their relevance and importance. This demands that we shall be ready to listen to others carefully, without antagonism if they express opinions which are displeasing to us, but trying always to discern the truth in what they have to offer. It calls, above all, for spiritual sensitivity. If our meetings fail, the failure may well be in those who are ill-prepared to use the method rather than in the inadequacy of the method itself.

It is always to be recognised that, coming together with a variety of temperaments, of backgrounds, education and experience, we shall have differing contributions to make to any deliberation. It is no part of Friends' concern for truth that any should be expected to water down a strong conviction or be silent merely for the sake of easy agreement. Nevertheless we are called to honour our testimony that to every one is given a measure of the light, and that it is in the sharing of knowledge, experience and concern that the way towards unity will be found. There is need for understanding loyalty by the meeting as a whole when, after all sides of a subject have been considered, a minute is accepted as representing the discernment of the meeting.

Not all who attend a meeting for church affairs will necessarily speak: those who are silent can help to develop the sense of the meeting if they listen in a spirit of worship.

2023.002 Representatives

The clerk has given permission for Lorna Foster, an Attender at Solihull to join us today.

The following meetings are represented: B&R, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, HAL, KIN, SEL, SOL, STO, SUT, WAL, WAR. We are aware that Hartshill meeting have been unable to send representatives, but hear that, though small in number, they are busy and in good spirit.

2023.003 How the Truth has prospered at Bull St Meeting

We have received a paper from Bull St telling us how the Truth has prospered in their meeting during the last year. We hear that the mid-week meeting is continuing in good spirit. We are grateful to Bull St Friends for the varied roles which they play being in the centre of Birmingham, and in particular for the warm hospitality which they extend to us at Area Meetings and when we meet for committee work.

2023.004 Membership matters

(a) Journey into membership

We have heard the report of the journey into membership of Clive Gordon, an attender at Sutton Coldfield LM. We welcome him into membership of the Religious Society of Friends and Central England Area Meeting. We ask his visitors to welcome him and the clerk to write to him.

(b) Application for membership

We have received an application for membership from Rajan Naidu, an attender at Selly Oak LM. We ask our Nominations Committee to find the names of visitors for Rajan

(c) Deaths

We record the deaths of our Friends Marcus Marcussen, (COT), Tenbury Wells, 27 October 2022, aged 99, Marian Singles, (SOL) 21 November 2022, aged 90; and Francis Rowland Dale, (SEL), 8 January 2023 aged 88. A memorial meeting to give thanks for the life of Rowland Dale will be held at Selly Oak Meeting House, 2pm Sunday 26 February.

(e) **Resignations**

We accept the resignations of Richard and David Maw (STO) and ask the clerk to write to them.

(f) **Transfer out request**

Peter Fishpool (COT) to Gloucestershire AM

Andrew & Rose Parry (STO) to Worcestershire & Shropshire AM

(g) **Transfer out confirmed**

David Fish (COV) to Leicester Area Meeting on 13 November 2022

Vicki Fennell (COV) to Northumbria Area Meeting, September 2022

2023.005 Memorial Minute for Daphne Maw

We have received a memorial minute for Daphne Maw (STO) and part of this has been read. We thank Stourbridge Friends for this and agree to pass the minute to our Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group for further consideration.

2023.006 Report from ecobirmingham

We have received the impact report 2021/2022 along with the annual update prepared for our Area Meeting from ecobirmingham. The extent and diversity of the work of ecobirmingham is heartening and humbling by turn. We are very grateful for its work and wish them well in their future endeavours as their influence continues to spread across the city.

2023.007 Trustees' report

We have received the annual report from our trustees which is filed with the minutes, and Judith Jenner has spoken to this. We thank our trustees for their work on our behalf, not least in the labours involved in redistributing the work load between the service committees and the Principal Officer; in particular we thank Judith Jenner for her service as clerk to trustees over recent years.

2023.008 Trustees' Terms of Reference

Further to minute 2022/103 of our last meeting when the draft terms of reference for trustees and their service committees were tabled we have received a background paper prepared by Gill Smith, incoming clerk to trustees. We are impressed and thankful for the work which has been done to produce this latest version. We agree to adopt these Terms of Reference and ask for the paper to indicate this accordingly.

2023.009 Membership clerk terms of reference

During her time as an AM co-clerk Stella Roberts undertook membership matters on our behalf. Stella is willing to continue with this work even though she has now stepped down as a co-clerk. It is therefore suggested that we create the new role of membership clerk and we have received draft terms of reference which we accept. We will consider Stella's nomination to the role later in our meeting.

2023.010 The promptings of love and truth

We have spent time in small groups or on our own reflecting on the first of our *Advices & Queries*. The small groups have operated in worship-sharing mode and individuals were invited to reflect through drawing, writing, or silent reflection.

2023.011 Report from Meeting for Sufferings

We have received a report on the recent Meeting for Sufferings from Claire Bowman and she has spoken to this.

She has told us of the tension between YM trustees and Meeting for Suffering and that the situation felt easier after opportunities for discernment in the meeting. We are asked by FWCC to uphold those Friends who are supporting Quakers who live in countries which border on Ukraine and to consider if we might have an active role to play.

We thank Claire for reporting to us today and wish her well in her role on the Meeting for Sufferings Support Group.

2023.012 Report from our Nominations Committee

We have received the annual report from our Nominations Committee. Amongst the items mentioned in the report is the concern for our outreach committee and the difficulty it has had in meeting.

We are grateful for the work that our Outreach Committee has done in the past. We have heard how Stourbridge have approached outreach differently by identifying local opportunities and finding Friends who could cluster informally together to work accordingly. It could be that outreach is really the concern of local meetings, asking nearby LMs for help as needed. Perhaps we could, as an Area Meeting, work on something for Quaker Week this year, considering this at a future Area Meeting. We are reminded that we have an outreach presence in the city in the form of the Peace Hub. The small working group set up last May could be asked to consider outreach matters, perhaps using social media. We hope that we might be able to work with our Local Development Worker on this issue and we are reminded that there are resources which the Area Meeting holds which could be used. We agree to return to this matter at our next meeting.

We thank our nominations committee for the work it does on our behalf and Claire Bowman for the report.

2023.013 Nominations

(a) Nominations Committee suggests

- Kate White (BOU) to serve on the Susanna Cole and Others Trust from the start of February 2023 until the end of January 2026
- Sally Kaminsky-Gaze (BOU) to serve on the management committee of the West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project (Peacemakers) from the start of February 2023 until the end of January 2026
- Judith Jenner (COT) and Dave Rawcliffe (WAR) to produce the 2022 Tabular Statement
- Rose Mackman to attend Junior Yearly meeting 2023
- Barbara Groombridge (WAL) to serve on the AM Clerks Advisory Committee from February 2023 until the end of January 2026
- Vic Grainger (BOU) to serve as an AM Nominations Co-clerk from the start of February 2023 until the end of January 2026
- Stella Roberts (COV) to serve as AM Membership Clerk from February 2023 until end of January 2026

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly and ask the office team to inform them as well as the clerks or convenors of the relevant committees.

(b) Release from service

The following Friends have asked to be released from service as indicated:

- Marina Mannasei (STO) as AM Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator
- Mark Russ (COT) as an elder
- Jo Hindley (COT) as an elder
- Paula Button (WAR) from elders and pastoral support group
- Lin Barrington (AML) released as a Pastoral Care Friend of (SEL)
- Donald Stubbings (BOU) from Susanna Cole and Others Trust

We are happy that these Friends should be released and thank them for their service. We ask the clerk to write to them.

(c) Elders and Pastoral Friends Nominations Committee suggests

Sanjive Mahandru (SEL) to serve as a Pastoral Care Friend for 3 years to end January 2026.

2023.014 Minutes from local meetings and committees

(a) Renaming of Area Meeting Triennial Elders and Overseers Nominations Committee

We note the change of name of this committee to Area Meeting Triennial Elders and Pastoral Friends Nominations Committee.

(b) Use of the term 'Overseer'

We note Stourbridge meeting's wish to use the term 'Pastoral Friend' instead of 'Overseer', and that Barnt Green & Redditch Meeting is in agreement with the change of name from Overseer to Pastoral Friend.

2023.015 Workcare report

We have received a report from Meg Harper (WAR) who represents us on the trustees of the industrial chaplaincy, Workcare Coventry and Warwickshire. The trustees have decided to cease operations at the moment and are looking for partner organisations who might, jointly, carry the work forward. A working party has been set up to explore possibilities. Meg, who is happy to continue as a trustee until the end of 2023 is, however, unable to commit the necessary time to be part of the working party. As an area meeting we are fully supportive of chaplaincy work and so ask our nominations committee to look for a Friend to serve on the working party. If they are able to find a Friend in time for the first meeting of the working group on 14 March we hope that that Friend will attend, subject to consideration of their name at our next meeting which is due on 18 March.

2023.016 Laying down of the Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture

We have received a letter from Michael Hutchinson, clerk of Q-CAT trustees, to say that they have regretfully taken the decision to lay down the charity. This concern was a corporate one recognised by Meeting for Sufferings and we were one of the supporting Area Meetings. We are grateful for the work that the charity undertook but recognise that priorities change and that concerns may get laid down, even if they sometimes come back again later. Barbara Forbes and John Cockcroft are trustees of the charity and we thank them for the work they have done on our behalf for the charity.

2023.017 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Bull St Friends for their hospitality and technical support today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, all day on Saturday 18 March with a children's programme led by Peacemakers.

John Sheldon
Clerk this time