

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Selly Oak Meeting House and online on 19 April 2023

Clerk: John Sheldon
Assistant Clerk: Alison Ironside

2023.031 Appointment of Assistant Clerk

We appoint Alison Ironside as assistant clerk for this meeting.

2023.032 Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard *Quaker Faith & Practice* 23.52 as follows:
I think I have wasted a great deal of my life waiting to be called to some great mission which would change the world. I have looked for important social movements. I have wanted to make a big and important contribution to the causes I believe in. I think I have been too ready to reject the genuine leadings I have been given as being matters of little consequence. It has taken me a long time to learn that obedience means doing what we are called to do even if it seems pointless or unimportant or even silly. The great social movements of our time may well be part of our calling. The ideals of peace and justice and equality which are part of our religious tradition are often the focus of debate. But we cannot simply immerse ourselves in these activities. We need to develop our own unique social witness, in obedience to God. We need to listen to the gentle whispers which will tell us how we can bring our lives into greater harmony with heaven.

Deborah Haines, 1978

2023.033 Representatives

The following Meetings are represented: B&R, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, KIN, SEL, STO, SUT, WAL, WAR.

The clerk has given permission for the following Attenders to join us today.

John Ironside (SEL), John Morris (SEL), Willemina Morton (SEL), Ian Neal (BOU)

2023.034 Membership matters

(a) Application

We have received an application for membership from Claire Cavendish (SEL). We ask our Nominations Committee to find the names of visitors for Claire and to report back to us.

(b) Death

We record the death of our Friend Elizabeth MacGregor (BOU) on 13 March 2023 aged 99. Elizabeth's memorial meeting will be held at Bournville Meeting House on 4 May at 11.30.

(c) Resignation

We have heard that Harriet Leslie (COT) wishes to resign her membership. Cotteridge Friends are clear that this is appropriate and so we accept Harriet's resignation and ask our membership clerk to write to her.

(d) Transfer out

Sarah Fishpool (COT) to Gloucestershire Area Meeting.

2023.035 How the Truth has prospered in our Local Meetings

Each year we ask our Local Meetings how the Truth has prospered amongst them. These returns are used to form part of our annual report to the Charity Commission. We have now had the opportunity to look through these as an Area Meeting and Claire Bowman has introduced them to us. We are encouraged and inspired to hear of some of the work which is happening in our local meetings, especially as Friends re-build their communities after the pandemic.

2023.036 Report from our Community Justice Group

We have received a report from our Community Justice Group on their work over the last year. There are currently eight members of this group and they support each other in their various roles. These cover chaplaincy work in prisons, hospitals, and the University of Birmingham, as well as retail chaplaincy, with the police, and work with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants. We are mindful that this work often involves relating to people in very difficult situations and are very grateful for what our Friends do on our behalf.

2023.037 Conference: Quakers in Criminal Justice

We have received a summary report from Robert Sprake and William Waddilove on the Quakers in Criminal Justice Annual Conference which was held at Hinsley Hall, Leeds, 24-26 February 2023. The three main speakers talked about how we do justice to both victim and prisoner; the work of Leeds GATE, a gypsy and traveller support organisation; and the tragic story of David Oluwale who was hounded to death by two police officers in 1969. There were also opportunities for workshop discussions. We are grateful that our Friends were able to attend the conference and for reporting back to us.

2023.038 Report from Meeting for Sufferings

We have received the report from Meeting for Sufferings prepared by Margot Williams. Claire Bowman has referred to some of the disquiet between Yearly Meeting trustees and Meeting for Sufferings. We thank Margot and Claire for the work they do to represent us on Meeting for Suffering.

We are aware the Yearly Meeting will be held before our next meeting and we uphold all Friends who are able to attend in person or on line.

2023.039 Report from Young Friends General Meeting

We have received a report from Sasha King-Smith who attended her first YFGM in February. We are very pleased to have this insight into the conduct and nature of YFGM, as well as to learn that Sasha feels that her spiritual life has been recharged. We wish her well in her exams and encourage any other Young Friends to send reports to us on future General Meetings.

2023.040 Membership: Call for discernment by Area Meetings

Following a request from Central Nominations Committee to consider current guidance regarding appointing only members to central committees, Meeting for Sufferings commissioned a review. This recommended that we could appoint attenders to such roles. However, consideration of this matter led Sufferings to the view that it wanted to have clarity on the nature of membership first. Not until we have clear understanding of membership would we be able to reach a decision on who can be appointed to central committees. Wishing to consult more widely Meeting for Sufferings has asked us to consider this matter and, in particular, to reflect on the following questions, and report back to them by the end of August this year.

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

In considering this matter we have been reminded that there can be a deep spiritual aspect to applying for membership, similar in a way to getting married. But we are aware that this pattern is not for all and that there may be geographic or social reasons, particularly amongst young Friends, for not wishing to apply. Membership should not be equated with sitting on committees; we need to make membership meaningful so that Attenders will want to join. The idea that Attenders of long standing (eg for a year) could automatically become Friends, provides food for thought. When we become a member we take responsibility for the Religious Society of Friends, its management and its spiritual life.

We ask our Local Meetings to consider the matter, ensuring that the voices of the young and old, attenders and members are heard, and report back by July Area Meeting. We also forward this concern to our Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group for their consideration.

2023.041 Update from our Local Development Worker

We have received an update from Hilary Topp, our Local Development Worker in which she has outlined the work she has done so far. She is planning to bring together various people involved in working with families, children and young people and invites interested Friends to be in touch with her. She is also keen to meet Friends through Zoom to chat about what is happening in their AMs and to see if she can support them. She hopes to form a group which will meet four times over six months to explore outreach.

We draw this report to the attention of our Local Meetings and ask those who may be concerned, for instance with families and young people, to make their interest known to Hilary Topp if possible. Jo Hallett and John Sheldon hope to attend the drop in session on 5 June.

We are grateful for this report and look forward to continuing to work with Hilary over the coming months.

2023.042 Outreach

We have been reminded of our minute 2023.012, the report from Nominations Committee, which focussed

on the difficulties that our Outreach Committee has had in meeting. We are also aware of Hilary Topp's intention to form an Exploring Outreach Group, possibly meeting for the first time this month or in May.

We are reminded of the importance of outreach and of the various ways in which local meetings and individual Friends do this work. We feel that, at an Area Meeting level, we should lay down our outreach committee in its current form, in the belief that we shall find new and creative ways of reaching out to the wider community, possibly plugging into the resources outlined by Hilary Topp in her report to us.

2023.043 Nominations

(a) Our nominations committee suggests the names of the following Friends to serve as indicated: Carole Pannell (STO) to serve a further triennium as an AM Safeguarding Coordinator, from March 2023 to February 2026.

Hilary Topp (COT) to serve a further triennium on the Susanna Cole & Others Trust, from June 2023 to May 2026.

Cathy Khurana (SUT) to serve a further triennium as a Talking Friend Trustee, from June 2023 to May 2026.

Howard Saunders (BOU) and Nicholas Ronan (STO) to serve a further triennium on the Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee, from April 2023 to March 2026.

Stella Roberts (COV) and Rob Hooper (WAR) to visit to explore the journey into membership of Lee Gunn, an attender at Coventry Meeting.

Sandra Berry (MAAM - Southern East Anglia AM) to serve as a Priory Rooms Director, from April 2023 to March 2027

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

(b) Release from service

Donald Whitlock (SOL) and Dave Rawcliffe (WAR) both wish to be released from further service on the Communications Committee. We agree to release our Friends and thank them for their service.

2023.044 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Selly Oak Friends for their hospitality and technical support today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, for a special Area Meeting to continue the discernment on What Love requires of us on Saturday 13th May 2023 at Balsall Heath Church Centre, 100 Mary Street, Birmingham, B12 9JU. Our next regular meeting for church affairs will be on Saturday 17th June 2023, 2pm, at Bournville. Friends are asked to send agenda items for this meeting to the clerks by Friday 2 June.

John Sheldon, Clerk this time