

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Warwick Meeting House and online on 6 July 2023

Clerk: John Sheldon Assistant Clerk: James Bradbury
Elder: Sarah Thompson Pastoral Friend: Jane Cunningham

2023.058 Appointment of Assistant Clerk

We agree to appoint James Bradbury as assistant clerk for this meeting.

2023.059 Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard part of *Quaker Faith & Practice* 23.36 as follows:

At the centre of Friends' religious experience is the repeatedly and consistently expressed belief in the fundamental equality of all members of the human race. Our common humanity transcends our differences. Friends have worked individually and corporately to give expression to this belief. We aspire not to say or do anything or condone any statements or actions which imply lack of respect for the humanity of any person. We try to free ourselves from assumptions of superiority and from racial prejudice...

Discrimination also takes more subtle forms. It may occur, and feelings may be hurt, by unthinking assumptions and lack of sensitivity. Being a Friend does not confer automatic protection against this, either as giver or receiver. In our dealings with members of minority groups in our daily lives and also within the Religious Society of Friends we may sometimes be less thoughtful and sensitive than we should be.

2023.060 Representatives

The following local meetings are represented: B&R, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, HAR, KIN, SEL, SOL, SUT, WAL, WAR.

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

Ian Neal (BOU), Jane Cunningham (WAR), Willemina Morton (SEL)

2023.061 Responding to Racism (R2R)

We have received a report from our Responding to Racism group set up by Area Meeting in April 2022, Minute 2022.025. The report shows how the group have built and sustained momentum, and what learning opportunities they have offered us, as well as suggesting possible next steps for them to take and questions for us to consider. Stuart Morton has spoken to the report and is asking for our support on possible next steps.

1. How can Responding to Racism help local meetings? The group would welcome invitations to speak.
2. Researching the history has shown that Cadbury's and two of the family trusts have acknowledged that, historically, the business used enslaved labour in producing cocoa and sugar.

Would the Area Meeting support funding for this research? We have benefitted from this heritage, but at what cost and to whom?

We agree to give spiritual and financial support to the group and hope that, if necessary, when the time comes, we will be able to apologise with an open heart, and this may take courage. We recognise that, though these are early days, we will need to decide what type of research is needed. We encourage the group to investigate this and to report back to us in due course.

We note that the group are organising a meeting for learning at Bournville FMH on 21 October.

We support the group in its work and agree to send this minute to our local meetings for any help they feel they might need in coming to terms with this issue. We need to change our hearts as we continue this work.

2023.062 Membership

(a) Transfer in

We have received a request from Southern East Anglia Area Meeting for the transfer of Sandra Berry to our Area Meeting. We accept this request and ask our clerk to issue a certificate of acceptance and to welcome our Friend into membership of our Area Meeting

We have received a request from Worcestershire & Shropshire Area Meeting for the transfer of Clare Myatt and Paul Myatt to our Area Meeting. We accept this request and ask our clerk to issue a certificate of acceptance and to welcome our Friends into membership of our Area Meeting.

(b) Journey into membership

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Lee Gunn (COV) whose full name is Kathleen Lesley Gunn, from Rob Hooper (WAR) and Eleanor Nesbitt (COV) and this has been read to us. We welcome Lee into membership of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and we ask her visitors to welcome her and the clerk to write to her.

2023.063 Marriage: Certificate of Accomplishment

The clerks have received Form H, the certificate of accomplishment, for the marriage of Matthew Gough, not-in-membership, and Andrew John Potter, not-in-membership, which took place on Sunday 2 July at Kings Norton Golf Club. We ask the clerk to file this certificate with the minutes and send a copy of this minute to Sarah Evans, our Registering Officer.

2023.064 How the Truth has prospered at Warwick Meeting

Gill Smith has spoken to a report from Warwick Friends informing us of how the Truth has prospered there in recent months, and this report reads as follows:

Meeting for Worship on Sunday morning continues to be blended and is attended by between 16 – 25 Friends. There are additional Meetings for Worship, via Zoom, on Sunday evenings and a monthly MfW based around Friends living in the Kenilworth area. This includes Friends from both Coventry and Warwick Meetings. The Bible Study group is continuing to meet and Elders have arranged a series of Meetings for Learning. Our Children's Meeting is available each week and is often attended by children. Our young people have contributed to the Area Meeting's discussion on membership and they regularly attend the Area Meeting Youth Group.

The group of Friends considering 'Preparing for Change in Old Age' meet monthly and have involved a variety of speakers as well as holding group led sessions. In early March the Journeymen Theatre performed 'Breeding Grounds'. This was very well attended and received.

The Quaker café operates five mornings a week providing a community resource and meeting place. The garden offers a green space in the centre of Warwick and is regularly used by people as a quiet place to eat their lunch as well as a safe space for children to play and others to relax. The planting is aimed at attracting wildlife and no-mow-May and jungle June has been well received. The neighbours are supportive and appreciative of the garden and one has offered to mow the grass we are cutting. The volunteer gardeners are often asked about Quakerism and the Meeting House as well as the plants in the garden.

The Meeting House provides rented space for a variety of groups and individuals. The two Meeting House flats are let, one to a family from Ukraine who moved here because of the war. At the beginning of March a weekly 'Conversation Café', for refugees and asylum seekers, was started at the Meeting House. This is supported and organised by representatives of the local Catholic, Unitarian and Quaker churches. The volunteers involved come from a number of faith groups and work together to provide English conversation in a supportive and welcoming environment.

2023.065 Appointing elders and pastoral Friends and their support group

Further to Minute 2023.049 we have received a paper from the clerk and considered this matter further. We ask the area meeting office administrator to keep the list of elders and pastoral Friends and to inform local meetings when periods of service are coming to an end.

We agree to adopt option 2 from the paper, namely to ask our Nominations Committee, possibly via a small search group, to consider the full list of Elders & Pastoral Friends and to make nominations based on that.

We agree that the current group should serve their existing term to the end of 2024. We ask our Nominations Committee to bring names for a new group to serve from January 2025.

2023.066 Responses from local meetings and individuals on membership

Further to Minute 2023.040 we have received numerous responses from our local meetings as well as some individuals. Meeting for Sufferings asked us to consider four questions before reporting back to them by the end of July and we have held these questions before us today:

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

In our discussion we have mostly concentrated on the first of these questions, seeing it as fundamental. We have been told that it may not be legally necessary to have membership, and this could be clarified, though we may need it for personal reasons. If there is no membership we may find it harder to disavow those who speak as a Quaker or on behalf of Quakers but whose views are not representative. Some members feel that their membership is a demonstration of commitment rather like a marriage. We have heard that some

Attendees feel that membership is divisive and they feel outside the Religious Society of Friends even when being comfortable in their Local Meeting.

We need to talk about membership and its meaning more often so that it is properly understood. There are many roles which do not require membership. In the last analysis membership may be a personal matter of saying "In this faith I wish to live and die".

We agree to send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings, along with the accompanying papers.

2023.067 Nominations

(a) Nominations Committee suggest

To serve as Area Meeting co-clerk from July 2023 until the end of December 2024, James Bradbury (STO), Paula Button (WAR) and Rae Ritchie (HAR)

To serve on the Clerk's Advisory Committee from July 2023 until the end of June 2026 Vic Grainger (BOU)

To serve on the Trustees Property Committee for a further triennium from July 2023 until the end of June 2026 Clare Peat (SEL)

To serve on the Susannah Cole and Others Trust for a further triennium from July 2023 until the end of June 2026 John Kimberley (BUL)

To serve on the AM Communications Committee from July 2023 until the end of June 2026 Clare Barnett (HAR)

Nessa Grimes (SEL) and Janet Blann (COT) to visit Tina Vendrells Feliu (SEL) on her journey into membership

Ralph Wallin (BOU) and Vic Grainger (BOU/B&R) to visit Anne Christie (BOU) on her journey into membership

John Lampen (STO) and Anne Ullathorne (COT) to visit JG on his journey into membership

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

(b) Warwick Local Meeting suggests

Jane Beale to serve as an elder from July 2023 to June 2026. This name being acceptable we appoint our Friend accordingly.

(c) Release from service

John Sheldon as an elder (WAR) and as Area Meeting co-clerk. This is John Sheldon's last Area Meeting as Co-Clerk. We thank him for his service in this role and for the many ways in which he has served this Area Meeting and his Local Meeting over a long period. We wish him and Marian every happiness in their new life in the North West.

2023.068 Thanks

We thank Warwick Friends for their hospitality and technical support today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, at Stourbridge on 12 August for a devotional, all-age, meeting then again at Coventry on 19 September with agenda items to the clerks by Friday 1 September.

Signed in and on behalf Central England Area Meeting

John Sheldon, clerk this time