



# Roundabout Central England



The newsletter of Central England Quakers - Summer 2023  
[centralenglandquakers.org.uk](http://centralenglandquakers.org.uk)

## Celebrating Partnership



*Tricia Bradbury shares news of a special event at Selly Oak Quaker Meeting House on Friday 2 June 2023:*

Probation Areas throughout Britain have been given beautiful wooden benches made by prisoners which commemorate the Coronation of King Charles. West Midlands Probation Area chose to donate their bench to Quakers because of their long-term partnership providing food parcels at Christmas for prisoners' families and those in most need.

## CEQ Asylum Group – call for supporters!

*Barbara Forbes invites Quakers in Central England to support a renewed Asylum Group:*

In early July, the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network held its AGM and Quarterly Meeting at Bull Street - our first face-to-face meeting since before the pandemic. Steering Group members were joined in person by Friends from London and Hereford, and also local Meetings Bull Street, Stourbridge, Sutton Coldfield and Walsall. Thanks to our recently developed technological skills (and the expert and calming support of the Priory Rooms staff) we were able to make this a blended meeting with other Friends from around the country.

Via video link we heard from Anne Stoltenberg of Migrant Voice, a campaigning organisation led by migrants to develop the skills of the migrant community to speak for themselves and not be dependent on others speaking for them. They do, however, welcome allies from the host community, especially in targeted campaigns such as the current work on visa fees, which was the focus of Anne's presentation. Shortly after our meeting, the government announced massive increases in those fees, meaning that thousands of people will now have to find over £3000 every 2.5 years in order to remain in the UK - and that is for every member of a family, including toddlers and new-born.

The presence of Friends from four of our local meetings allows us to hope that the Area Meeting Asylum Group can be revived.

**This is more urgent than ever due to recently passed legislation.**

Now that the government has broken the psychological barrier of passing legislation which violates international agreements, we all need to worry what their next steps might be.

We are proposing to arrange a zoom meeting in the first instance to discuss the future of our Asylum Group, and ideally, we would like

someone from every Meeting to take part. Please contact Barbara Forbes if you would like to join us.

## Restorative Justice and Slavery

*As members of CEQ's Responding to Racism group', Rob Hooper and Jane Cunningham have been considering aspects of restorative justice in connection with the historical links of early Quakers to slavery.*

We have been focussing on slavery in Barbados where we have both lived and worked. Rob taught there soon after Barbadian (Bajan) independence, and Jane and her family lived there for five years at a later date. We both loved the time we were in Barbados and getting to know people there.

We feel that it needs to be more generally acknowledged that Barbados was the epicentre of British slavery in the Caribbean, and the earliest slave colony. Many of the enslaved people were later sold to colonies in the New World. Numerous Quakers emigrated to Barbados for religious or economic reasons – so many in fact that Barbados was called “the nursery of truth”. Most Quakers at that time accepted slavery and many were indeed the owners of, or even traders in, enslaved people.

**We feel that this historical truth has a continuing impact on the island and are aware that the Republic is calling for restorative justice.**

We are considering developing links with various charities in Barbados, perhaps those which help disadvantaged young people. We hope to make a modest personal financial contribution to a charity which accords well with the Reparation Plan outlined by the CARICOM Reparations Commission.

We would be happy to update Roundabout about our progress with this.



## Open to New Light: Quakers and Other Faiths

*Eleanor Nesbitt reflects on the process of writing Open to New Light: Quakers and Other Faiths, John Hunt Publishing.*

When Jennifer Kavanagh suggested to me last year that I might like to write a book on Quakers and other faiths for the Quaker Quicks series I wasn't immediately sure how to respond. I found myself thinking of *Interfaith Pilgrims*, my Swarthmore lecture book, twenty years ago, and I wondered whether I had anything new to say. In fact, Jennifer's challenging invitation has sent me on a new journey of discovery for which I am deeply grateful.

The resultant book moves historically from the seventeenth century, with George Fox's knowledge of the Qur'an and William Penn's engagement with native American religion, to the present time, when a number of Quakers (that is Quakers in our 'unprogrammed', pastorless minority among Quakers globally) identify ourselves as also being Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish or Muslim.



*Eleanor receiving a lifetime achievement award from the Punjab Research Group. Taken by Dr Aditi Kumar*

The book includes chapters on 'interfaith pointers in Quakers' books of discipline' and on Quakers' various approaches and initiatives regarding people of other faiths. Other chapters recount interaction between Quakers and, variously, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and Jains, Sikhs and Baha'is. I was keen, too, to include Humanists plus people who are often grouped together as following 'indigenous religions'. So pagans, Pagans (and Quagans) very briefly feature as do reflections from Quakers in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Writing the book brought me face to face with our Quaker testimonies, reopened the rawness of some current Quaker-Jewish relations, and brought intriguing exchanges and images to my attention. These include the 1913 flurry of communication between UK Quakers and the spiritual head of the Baha'is and the juxtaposed reliefs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Elizabeth Fry on the exterior of a London gurdwara.

As is the case for more and more people, my own life has been a continuous succession of religiously interesting encounters, including being brought up by Christian parents with very different outlooks. As a child, near the New Forest, I was aware of Romani people living nearby and I learned a lot from a Jewish schoolfriend. A few years after attending my first Quaker Meeting I was, in the 1970s, living in north India, working in a school and exploring. As an academic, much of my research has entailed fieldwork among Sikh communities in the Midlands and among very diverse Christian and Hindu congregations as well as mentoring students in their studies that focused on Buddhist and Muslim issues. In 'retirement' my major preoccupation is Sikh studies. Decade after decade, Coventry Quaker Meeting and Woodbrooke have provided ongoing support, as have my Hindu husband and wider Hindu family.

My book brings together a wealth of quotations which will, I hope, inspire readers in their own explorations.

# Revising our Book of Discipline

*Wendy Burnett reflects on a discussion on revising the of the Book of Discipline held at Bull Street Quaker Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2023*

Bull Street Quaker Meeting take an interest in the revision of the Book of Discipline and have received information on progress from Simon Gray (a previous member of the review committee) on two occasions and felt ready for a further update. We were directed to the Book of Discipline Revision Committee who have a number of members who are able to provide this information to Area and Local Meetings. Thanks to Mary Woodward (diary manager for BDRC) for arranging this session with the BDRC members who were able to join us.

We opened this discussion to the Area Meeting and were very pleased to welcome Friends from Coventry QM by zoom and with Friends from Cotteridge, Warwick and Solihull meetings in person on Sunday 28th May.

We were joined by Rhiannon Grant (Bournville) in person who led the session, Jennifer Kavanagh (London West AM), Matt Moore (Northumberland AM) and Anya Nanning Ramamurthy who is a student at Lancaster University. All of them have been on the committee from the start of the process.

The committee itself is diverse in age, experience and theology. Working in groups as well as in plenary sessions, they are thinking prayerfully, creatively, curiously and boldly.

**The work brings its frustrations and challenges as well as being a privilege.**



*The current edition of Quaker Faith & Practice*

We heard from each of them about the work involved at the same time answering the questions we had sent earlier and also those which arose as the result of the discussion.

Quaker Faith and Practice (QF&P) describes our faith and organisation and we formally call this book our Book of Discipline – (full title *The book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*).

The committee's role is not to change the practice and procedure of our faith: that would be for Yearly Meeting to decide.

**The committee's role is to integrate, and give more clarity to, the guiding principles of what it means to be a Quaker in the 21st century.**

This is shown in the two drafts recently submitted, for comment, on Nominations and the meaning of Marriage.

The committee are also looking to make the accessibility of the book as diverse as possible for example online, via apps, mobile phones – taking into account the different needs of people. They will be looking at the audience – new, old, young, elderly – and adding contemporary voices.

The revision is expected to take around 10 years which is how long it took for the previous revision. It is hoped to have a draft ready for Yearly Meeting in 2027.

The anthology section of QF&P is diverse both theologically and in terms of contributors. The range, however, is to be updated. We are encouraged to submit passages, music, videos, that speak to us and which may also have helped us in service for Friends, for example as Trustees, Elders and Pastoral Friends.

The committee is aware of how QF&P is used individually, privately, within meetings as well as use by small Quaker communities outside

Keep up to date with the work of the committee and read the sample sections at [www.quaker.org.uk/resources/quaker-faith-and-practice/revising-quaker-faith-practice](http://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/quaker-faith-and-practice/revising-quaker-faith-practice)

Britain Yearly Meeting. We were reminded that previous books of QF&P are still available and in use and this will continue to be the case. They are not going to be destroyed!

There was some discussion on discernment and unity which can be difficult at times.

### **Diversity is important but so is unity of spirit.**

In revising the Book of Discipline, we have to be sure of what our faith is. Advice No1 reminds us to: *“Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose light shows us our darkness and brings us new light.”*

Theological diversity was a big issue even before the start of the revision. Friends are concerned about losing God/Jesus/Bible/Spirit from the book. We were assured that God will appear in the draft passages and will not disappear. Quakerism is rooted in Christianity but with respect required for other thoughts.

There is a fine line between reflection and prescription. As we were reminded of the passage from the epistle issued by a meeting of elders at Balby in 1656 *“...these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”*

We are encouraged to engage with the revision committee via the Quakers in Britain website – Revising Quaker Faith and Practice. These pages explain the decision to review and how things are progressing in “The Story so Far”. Comments, suggestions and ideas for content including those that should be kept, are invited. These can also be submitted by email and post.

We were also referred to the QuakerBooks publication – God, Words and Us -Quakers in conversation about religious differences - edited by Helen Rowlands

We had an informative and interesting session which proved very useful and gave some reassurance! We look forward to hearing further progress and uphold the committee in their task.

## George Fox Green Plaque Unveiling

*Clare Barnett reports on the unveiling of a new ‘green plaque’ remembering Quaker founder George Fox.*



On Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> June a number of Hartshill Quakers joined other Friends from Leicestershire at Fenny Drayton Church for the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the significance of George Fox to the church. The plaque is situated on the wall outside Fenny Drayton church and it reads ‘George Fox 1624 -1691 Founder of the Quaker Movement Baptised and began to formulate his beliefs in this church’.

The plaque is part of an initiative by Leicestershire County Council where members of the public could nominate historical people and places to be recognised with a green plaque - similar to blue plaques in other places. The nominated people and places were then put to a public vote. George Fox was nominated by John Catt, a humanist from Loughborough and John Spence, a Quaker who lives in Kent. They both gave very interesting speeches in the church about their reasons for nominating Fox and his influence and that of Quakerism on society along with a speech about the life of Fox given by the chairman of Leicestershire County Council, Kevin Feltman.

The event was well attended by Friends, local people and dignitaries from the council. Some of us wondered what George Fox would have made of it all but we agreed on the importance of continuing to find ways to recognise, share and remember his history and legacy.



# Quaker Burial Ground – Lodge Hill Cemetery

*Wendy Burnett, Vic Grainger, Alison Ironside and Susan Steadman share some of the history of the Quaker burial ground at Lodge Hill.*

There are many Quaker burial grounds attached to meeting houses across the country and there are a number of these in Central England Quakers, for example Stourbridge, Coventry and Warwick – all now closed for burials. At Bull Street there was also a burial ground with the last use being in 1925. This burial ground also contained the remains from the first Quaker meeting house burial ground, dating from the late 1600s, which was situated where the Great Western Arcade is now.

In 1931, a portion of the area of B6 at Lodge Hill Cemetery and Crematorium was obtained to replace the Quaker burial ground at Bull Street which closed following the rebuilding of the meetinghouse.

This “new” burial ground seems to continue to be a well-kept secret probably resulting from a change of burial practice favouring cremation. Apart from a few burials and the seven graves used to re-inter the remains from the Bull Street graveyard in 2001/2 due to the building of Priory Rooms, there has been little use. This lack of use resulted in requests from Birmingham City Council for permission to use part of the area for public cremation memorials. These were granted leaving a total of 21 graves available for Quaker use. It is also useful to note that once a burial has taken place, ashes may also be buried in the plot.

The original designation for the whole area of B6 had been given over to Free Church burials and from looking at the site, a good portion of the south end of B6 has a distinct Quaker use eg Cadbury, Southall.

**It would seem appropriate that the designated ground for Quaker use should be next to this area.**

A group was appointed in 2012 to liaise with

Birmingham City Council and to bring the area to the attention of Central England Quakers. This group progressed the provision of a memorial stone for the 7 graves containing the remains from the Bull Street burial ground.

The memorial stone was in place in 2014. (see above right)

The group has also been researching records relating to burials in our archives. We found that George Cadbury (Junior) had purchased a number of graves, around 1900, in the older area of B6 for use by Quakers in Selly Oak, Northfield and Bournville meetings who could not afford a burial plot. The names of Friends buried here are noted on the deeds – now in the CEQ archives in the Library of Birmingham. These graves, it should be noted, are not marked and are grassed over.

Although the group has not met formally for a while, we do continue to receive and advise on questions relating to the burial ground.

For those who may be interested in purchasing a burial plot at Lodge Hill, the following information will be useful. There have been a number of changes in recent years regarding contact with Birmingham City Council Bereavement Services who administer the cemetery. The office at the entrance to Lodge Hill Cemetery is no longer open for general visitors. For general enquiries and to make appointments, contact is made with Birmingham City Council Bereavement Services, who administer the site, by calling 0121 216 2000 then following the instructions through to reach the office dealing with the cemeteries including Lodge Hill.

As noted, there are 21 full plots available for Quakers in this burial ground. The group members listed above are happy to answer any initial general queries but advice on costs etc and appointments should be made via the information given above.



# Quakers and the dialogue with the Monarchy

*Roderick Keefe – Quaker Chaplain at the University of Birmingham, shares a reflection on the complex relationship between Quakers and the Monarchy.*

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is one of just 27 privileged bodies which retain the historic right to present an address to the British sovereign in person. Quakers uphold a testimony to equality, which is at odds with an hereditary monarchy, but this offers a rare chance to catch the ear of power.

Margaret Fell addressed Charles II in 1660 like this: “We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity; it is our desire that others feet may walk in the same way.”

In 1660 Mary Dyer was hung in Boston, Massachusetts because she defied the puritan fathers who described Quakers as “the most dangerous of heretics”. Others were waiting to suffer the same fate when messages got to Charles II and he ordered an end to capital punishment for heresy.

At that same time the English aristocracy and the Church of England moved to wipe out Quakers. Parliament passed the “Quaker Act” which made it a crime to refuse to swear an oath or assemble in numbers of five or more under the pretence of joining in a religious worship not authorized by the laws of this realm.

Thankfully we have moved on 363 years to our new King when on to the 9th March 2023 Charles received a loyal address from British Quakers including these and other statements:

“We thank for you for speaking out for the environment, emphasising that a just solution to the climate crisis requires disrupting existing economic systems which are not operating within ecological limits or upholding dignity and equality for all.”

“We welcome trans and gender diverse people within our Quaker worshipping communities”.

The current monarchy has a more symbolic role compared to generations ago, so our new King can become in modern terms an Influenc-

er, not just using social media but influencing other heads of state and governments.

Quakers often invite others to join with us in upholding Simplicity Truth Equality and Peace. Quakers have a reputation of speaking truth to power.

**Most Friends would not take an oath to the new King Charles, but this should not stop us from speaking to him and others in power.**

*This article first appeared in the University of Birmingham chaplaincy newsletter.*

## Peace begins with us all

*Pete Doubtfire, co-ordinator of our project Peace Hub, reports on their new theme for the coming months: Peaceful Brum.*

There’s lots of great work for peace & justice happening across our area. Sometimes it’s obvious, other times we may be walking past a peaceful place every day without thinking about it.

As part of our ‘Peaceful Brum’ theme we’ll be partnering with the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership to celebrate the positive people, places & organisations that are already helping to make peace in our city and think about what we can all do to help our community.

Peace Hub is open at 41 Bull St (in front of the meeting house) every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday between 11am and 5pm. All are welcome to drop in for a cuppa and a chat.



*Birmingham’s Peace Garden, photo by Elliot Brown licenced under Creative Commons 2.0 BY*

# Notices & Dates for your Diary

## Weekly Climate Vigil

A group of Friends meet at 1:30 every Wednesday outside St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham. We stand in silence for 15 minutes in a vigil highlighting 'concern for the climate crisis'.

Come and join us when you can.



## New Venue for Walsall Quakers

Walsall Meeting has moved (again!) As of June 2023, Walsall Quakers meet at:

*St Matthews Centre,  
St Matthews Close,  
Walsall,  
WS1 3DG*

Meeting for Worship will be from 11.00am to 12:00pm on Sundays, as usual. Any Friends wishing to visit us would be very welcome.

For more information please contact:  
walsall@quaker.org.uk

## Heritage Open Days

Several meeting houses will be open for Heritage Open Days between 8th and 17th September, including:

Bournville Quaker Meeting House  
65 Linden Rd, Bournville, B30 1JT  
10am—4pm Saturday 9th September

Bull St Quaker Meeting House  
41 Bull St, Birmingham, B4 6AF  
10am-4:30pm Saturday 16th September

*Bournville Quakers would also love as many local Friends as possible to join us as volunteers: contact Anne Giles.*



*The Quaker Service Memorial Exhibition will be displayed as part of Heritage Open Days*

## Film Nights at Barnt Green

Barnt Green & Redditch Quakers invite you to join them at their monthly film showings.

*Barnt Green & Redditch Quaker Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green, B45 8NR*

Friday 15th September 7pm  
Western about a town marshal and his Quaker wife.

Friday 20th October 7pm  
Comedy about a cleaning lady and a Dior dress.

Friday 17th November 7pm  
Comedy set in France, starring Helen Mirren.

**Do you have news to share for the next edition of Roundabout Central England?**

Please send news, reflections, and notices to: [website@ceaqm.org.uk](mailto:website@ceaqm.org.uk)