

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

Clerk: Rae Ritchie Assistant Clerk: Paula Button
Elders: Mig Kerr & Gyll Brown Pastoral Friends: Lee Gunn & Diane Stobbs

2023.069 Worship and memorial minute

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of our Friend Jessica Mary Webb (BGR), known as Mary, on 20 August 2023 aged 92. This morning we received news of the death of our Friend Marguerite Harris (SOL), known as Peggy, on 12 September 2023 aged 94. We also heard part of the memorial minute to show the grace of God in the life of Barbara Wallin, prepared by Friends at Bournville and Sutton Coldfield meetings.

2023.070 Representatives

The following Local Meetings are represented: BGR, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, HAL, HAR, KIN, SEL, SOL, STO, SUT, WAL, WAR.

The clerk has given permission for the following Attenders to join us today: Lesley Butterwick (COV), Chris Dunkley (COV), Ian Neal (BOU), Sara Rees (SEL), Francesca Rogers (COV) and Ian Taylor (SUT).

2023.071 Report from Peacemakers

We heard a joyful and heart-warming report from Sara Hagel, director of Peacemakers, about the organisation's work over the last twelve months, focusing particularly on two projects. The first is the peer mediation training, conflict resolution by children and young people for children and young people, which Peacemakers delivers in schools in the region. The project aimed to triple their provision of this programme and are on target to achieve this goal, with next term already fully booked up. Sara also shared a video created by Quakers in Britain that shows this work in action in a school in Coleshill. We encourage Friends to share this video, which is available on YouTube, with their Meetings (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ypeZq33G7c>).

The project has begun returning to schools where they have delivered peer mediation training to assess the longer term impact on those involved and the results have been illuminating, from lunchtime supervisors saying that break times are far calmer now, to several children stating that peer mediation training had helped in relationships outside of school too.

The second project that Sara talked about was getting a three year grant from the Quaker charity the Sir James Reckitt Foundation to develop peace education for 7-11 year olds nationally. This has led to peace education organisations across the UK coming together to share their experiences and training for small Quaker peace education groups are in the pipeline too. We thank Sara and all the team at Peacemakers for their continued hard work and commitment.

2023.072 How the Truth has prospered at Coventry Meeting

Mig Kerr has spoken to a report from Coventry Friends informing us of how the Truth has prospered there recently. The report reads as follows:

On most Sundays we hold blended Meeting for Worship, in the Meeting House and on Zoom. We also provide two in-person only Meetings for Worship and one Zoom only Meeting for Worship per month. We are aware of continuing tensions amongst Friends over preferred modes of worship and also setting up the technology; we strive to manage these in a way that is as inclusive as possible and doesn't place undue burdens on a small number of individuals. We feel it is better that these sources of conflict are brought into the open and resolved creatively as a community. We hold a blended midweek Meeting for Worship weekly, Meeting for Worship in a local park on Bank Holiday Mondays and a monthly 'Experiment with Light' group. Our regular monthly Meetings for Learning used the Quaker Quest format to explore the Testimonies. Nineteen of us had a very successful 24-hour stay at Woodbrooke with opportunities for spiritual development and social connection. Our connection with Hartshill LM has grown through a regular intervisitation on fifth Sundays (from Friends preferring their in-person worship) and through their participation in the Woodbrooke event. We held a funeral and Memorial Meeting for an attender who had Quaker links in the past. We received a Friend travelling in the Ministry in August. After Meeting for Worship speakers have included the CEQ Responding to Racism Group and a Just Stop Oil activist.

Opportunities for social connection include refreshments after Meeting for Worship, monthly Bring & Share lunch, occasional film showings in the Meeting House. Our Spring Party gave an opportunity for many Friends, some of whom are less established in the Meeting, to lead activities.

Our presence in the city continues with individuals involved in various peace and social justice groups: Coventry Migrant Women's House; Coventry Peace House; Lord Mayor's Committee for Peace and Reconciliation, including Hiroshima Day commemorations and a major learning event; Coventry Chapel of Unity; Clothing Coventry; Coventry Extinction Rebellion and others. We hosted a group of GCSE students who were learning about Quaker worship and the Quaker Peace Testimony. Reports of all these activities, and more, appear in our quarterly newsletter.

We find it difficult to carry out many of the roles needed to maintain our Meeting House and the life of the Meeting. Currently we have just agreed to lay down production of our own newsletter for the time being, and we are working out how to manage our busy room hire business without undue stress on one or two people. Much time and energy has been devoted to the project of making the Meeting House more accessible and we are grateful for the continuing support of CEQAM trustees. Our Fundraising group are working to gather sufficient funds to move on with the plans, and this weighs heavily on the Meeting currently.

*Mig Kerr, convenor of Elders and Gillian Waddilove, clerk
September 2023*

Copies of the fundraising leaflet to support the build redevelopment will be shared with all Local Meeting clerks soon.

We thank Coventry meeting for their honest account, which includes areas for celebration and recognition of challenges. The tensions within Local Meetings, regarding blended worship, technology and administration, are no doubt familiar to many.

2023.073 Membership

(a) Applications

We have received an application for membership from Elise Coblentz-Baumann (BUL). We ask our Nominations Committee to find Friends to visit them and to report back to us with the names.

(b) Journeys into membership

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Anne Christie (BOU) from Ralph Wallin (BOU) and Vic Grainger (BOU) and this has been read to us. We have also received a report on the journey into membership of Claire Cavendish (SEL) from Diana Lampen (STO) and Valerie Jenner (SEL) and this has been read to us.

A third report, on the journey into membership of JG from John Lampen (STO) and Anne Ullathorne (COT), has been read to us too.

We welcome Anne, Claire and JG into membership of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and ask their visitors to welcome them and the clerk to write to them. We also ask the clerking team to liaise with the prison chaplain, Tricia Bradbury, and to return to Area Meeting with ways that we could support JG and make him part of the Area Meeting as well as support other Friends within the Area Meeting that likewise come with difficult backgrounds.

(c) Reinstatement of membership

We have heard from Ann James (WAR) about a request from pastoral Friends at Warwick Local Meeting to reinstate Lyndon Thomas' membership of Central England Quakers.

Area Meeting agrees that in this case, this is an appropriate course of action. We therefore welcome Lyndon back into membership of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and ask Warwick Elders to welcome him and the Area Meeting clerk to write to him welcoming him back into membership.

(d) Resignation

We have received a letter from Alice Yaxley (WAR) asking to resign her membership. Warwick Friends believe that Alice has not taken this decision lightly and they will continue to support Alice and her family as much as possible. We accept this request and ask the clerk to write to her, sending her love and warmest wishes as her spiritual journey continues.

(e) Internal transfers

We note the following internal transfers: Lin Singh Barrington from UNA to BOU, Cyril Bezant from SEL to COT and Sean Tomas Beag from BGR to COT. UNA stands for Unattached List.

2023.074 Meeting for Sufferings report

Claire Bowman (BOU) has spoken to a report about the Meeting for Sufferings held on 1 July 2023. The report reads as follows:

This meeting was extraordinary in many ways. Yearly Meeting decided to hold an extra session on the day scheduled for Meeting for Sufferings. This meant that everyone was invited, not just Meeting for Sufferings representatives and that Meeting for Sufferings had only the last hour and a half to do its business.

The extra Yearly Meeting session was called so that Yearly Meeting Trustees could present their report and finance report to YM. The financial report had not been ready in time for Yearly Meeting at the end of April. However, it was still not ready at the start of July! Trustees apologised to the meeting and acknowledged that they had messed up and told us that extra staff had been employed and that the report would definitely be ready in time for the Charity Commission deadline at the end of October and that they would have an online meeting with us before then. The problems apparently are to do with the auditors needing to assure themselves on matters to do with debtors and creditors and largely to do with the Quiet Company, which is the catering and lettings business which normally brings in a substantial income for BYM. We can all expect an invitation to an online session in September or October.

There were 150 present in person and around 300 online for the meeting and many Friends were deeply concerned about this failure by trustees. Were we asking them to do too much? Were staff being challenged sufficiently to get the work done? It was a grueling session for staff and trustees.

We went on to consider the annual Yearly Meeting Tabular Statement, which was presented to us by the Recording Clerk, Paul Parker. This had also been postponed because Yearly Meeting this year spent so much time considering its structures. Paul told us that there are now 18,695 members and attenders in Britain, and 973 children. There's been a loss of 337 members this year. There are now 456 local meetings. Quite a number of Friends worship online and many more continue to worship in a blended way. Many meetings are shrinking but Paul told us that 92 are growing. 'We need to ask what are they doing' he said, 'to make this happen'. This prompted ministry about outreach and the meeting minuted that more money should be found nationally for outreach. It prompted me to attend an outreach session put on by our Local Development Worker, Hilary Topp, which has led to the formation of a Midlands outreach group.

The meeting concluded with a prolonged further consideration about changes to central structures (YM minutes 30 and 50 refer) and arrived at no firm conclusion. Changes to Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Quaker Life, and Meeting for Sufferings are considered needful but no firm conclusion was arrived at. A national consultation is going to take place.

Meeting for Sufferings

In the time available MfS dealt first with appointments. Of interest to us is that Simon Gray was released from service on the Book of Discipline Review Group

We then turned to the Loyal Address to the King on the occasion of his coronation. This had been requested with 3 weeks notice so there was not enough time for a broad consideration about whether Quakers should take part in it. Staff and Trustees decided that it offered an opportunity for Quaker concerns to be aired and an address was put together. A group was drawn up to present the address and Young Friends General Meeting was asked if they wanted to send some representatives but they returned a minute saying that they thought we should have nothing to do with it. MfS heard ministry about all the good work that the King has done for biodiversity and disadvantaged people but were we complicit with the domination system of world powers to have taken part? We decided to return to the matter at a future date

There were minutes sent in by 6 Area Meetings on the matter of Ecocide, saying that Yearly Meeting should take a position on this and support the aims and campaign of Stop Ecocide International. However, there was a preference to address the issue in a Quakerly way, on the basis that Friends who want to join Stop Ecocide can do so if they wish. Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee are setting up an informal group of members of QPSWCC and representatives of concerned AMs. All Area Meetings with an interest in this are invited to join the group. There will be time allocated to Ecocide as well as other climate and sustainability issues at the MfS residential meeting in October and I hope to be able to report that Central England are keen to take part.

As there was no more time, other important issues such as Slavery and membership had to be postponed; however it was good to have so many Friends from around the Yearly Meeting attending Meeting for Sufferings and learning more about what we do.

Claire Bowman

We also heard from Claire that Area Meeting minute 2023.050 Minute from Community Justice Group: Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) from 17 June 2023 will be on the agenda at Meeting for Sufferings in October.

We note that Stop Ecocide alongside other climate justice issues are on the agenda at October Area Meeting.

2023.075 Peace Hub report

We have received the Peace Hub Annual Report for 2022 and a written statement from the Peace Hub Management Committee about the centre's activities since it reopened after Covid. We note that the committee is appealing to Local Meetings to donate towards core costs. We ask Local Meetings and individuals within the Area Meeting to consider contributing to this appeal if they are able.

2023.076 Nominations

(a) Nominations Committee suggest

- Christine Bagnall (COT) to serve a further triennium as a Trustee from September 2023 to August 2026
- Esther Boyd (COT) to serve on Trustees Property Committee for a further two years from October 2023 to September 2025. Esther has served for one year already
- Robert Sprake (UNA) to serve on Trustees Property Committee for a further triennium from September 2023 to August 2026
- Peter Ullathorne (COT) to serve on Oak Tree House Advisory Committee for a further two years from October 2023 to September 2025. Peter has served for one year already
- Susan Steadman (COT) to serve as a Talking Friend Trustee for another year from September 2023 to August 2024. Susan has served for two years already

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

(b) Names for Area Meeting Nominations Committee

- Paul Hewitt (HAR) to serve on Area Meeting Nominations Committee until the end of 2024

This name being acceptable, we appoint our Friend accordingly.

(c) Release from service

- Clare Barnett (HAR) from Area Meeting Nominations Committee
- Robert Sprake (UNA) from the Community Justice Group

We thank our Friends for their service.

2023.077 Minute from Cotteridge Local Meeting: Quaker Witness & Action for Climate Justice

Jo Hindley (COT) spoke to the following minute that we have received from Cotteridge Local Meeting:

2023/24 Quaker Witness & Action for Climate Justice

Our Friend, Jo Hindley, has brought to us a concern that Britain Yearly Meeting considers Climate Justice as the central focus of its next meeting in July 2024. This issue is one which affects everyone and everything we hold dear and challenges us in our upholding of all our Quaker testimonies. Britain Yearly Meeting committed to being a low-carbon community in 2011 and we would welcome the opportunity to return to this matter. We ask Area Meeting to consider this and to send a minute to Britain Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee to request that this be done. We send this part of the minute to Area Meeting and to the Central England Climate Emergency Action Group.

Heather Rowlands, clerk, Cotteridge Local Quaker Meeting

As an Area Meeting, we are committed to tackling the climate emergency and climate injustice through all means available to us. This includes voicing our collective concerns as Quakers at a national and international level, locally and regionally, as well as supporting and informing one

another, for example sharing the work of Defend our Juries, Insure Our Future and Fair Share Action, with which Quakers are already involved. We agree to send this minute to the Britain Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee and urge them to make climate justice and our response the central concern of the Yearly Meeting agenda in 2024.

We have heard throughout this evening's meeting about the action already being undertaken by individuals and local meetings in this area. We will also return to the subject of climate justice and Quaker support for climate action during our next Area Meeting in October 2023, and look particularly to discern what we – individually and collectively – as Quakers can do. While our individual responses may be different, it is by working together that we can take meaningful action on these issues.

2023.078 Area Meeting dates and venues in 2024

The Area Meeting co-clerking team has prepared a provisional calendar for Area Meetings in 2024. We ask Local Meetings to consider which meeting they could offer to host and, for the weekday meetings, which day they would prefer. Please send all offers to Helen Waters in the office by 31 October 2023. We plan to share a finalised list of dates and venues by the November Area Meeting.

The suggested programme is:

| Month | Day | Date | Time | LM host | Agenda items deadline |
|---|--|--|--|---------|-----------------------|
| January | Saturday | 27 th | 1400-1700 | BUL | 9 th |
| February | | | | | |
| March | Tuesday OR Wednesday OR Thursday | 19 th 20 th 21 st | 1800-2100 | | 5 th |
| April | Saturday | 27 th | 1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business | | 9 th |
| May | Tuesday OR Wednesday OR Thursday | 21 st 22 nd 23 rd | 1800-2100 | | 7 th |
| June | Saturday | 22 nd | 1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business | | 4 th |
| July* | Tuesday OR Wednesday OR Thursday | 16 th 17 th 18 th | 1800-2100 | WAR | 2 nd |
| * We suggest that Local Meetings hold their business meetings on Sunday 30 th June | | | | | |
| August | Devotional + Fox@400 | 17 th | TBC | HAR | N/A |
| September | Saturday | 28 th | 1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business | | 10 th |
| October | Tuesday OR Wednesday OR Thursday | 22 nd 23 rd 24 th | 1800-2100 | | 8 th |
| November | Saturday | 23 rd | 1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business | BUL | 5 th |
| December | | | | | |

2023.079 Trustees' annual report and accounts

The Central England Quakers Trustees Annual Report and Accounts for 2022 have been circulated to Area Meeting following their approval by trustees on 1 August 2023. A single copy of the document has been sent to all Local Meeting clerks. Additional copies are available from the Area Meeting office and they are published online on the Central England Quakers website and will be on the Charity Commission website too.

We ask Friends to review the report and accounts over the coming weeks and raise any questions with the Area Meeting office by 27 October 2023. The questions and responses, as well as the 2024 budget, will then be discussed at the Area Meeting on 18 November 2023.

2023.080 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Coventry Friends for their warm welcome, hospitality and technical support today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, at Barnt Green Meeting House on 14 October 2023 for an in-person, all-age workshop organised by the "What does love require of us?" special working group in the morning (arrivals from 10am, workshop to begin at 1030am) followed by lunch (1pm-2pm) and a blended Meeting for Worship for Business with Peacemakers activities for children and young people (2pm-5pm).

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Rae Ritchie, clerk this time