

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Barnt Green Meeting House and online on 14 October 2023

Clerk: James Bradbury Assistant Clerk: Paula Button
Elders: Sue Thompson and Anne Ullathorne Pastoral Friend: Sarah Jones

2023.081 Worship and memorial minutes

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the deaths of our Friends David Pugh (SEL) on 22nd September 2023 aged 79, and Judith Sanderson (SUT) on 30th September 2023 aged 73. We also heard parts of the memorial minutes to show the grace of God in the lives of Rowland Dale and Elizabeth MacGregor, prepared by Friends at Selly Oak and Bournville Meetings (respectively).

2023.082 Representatives

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

The clerk has given permission for the following Attenders to join us today: Wai-ling and Mic Bickerton (BGR), Ian Taylor (SUT), Fran Wilde (SEL)

2023.083 Reflections and Discernment from the Morning's Workshop

We started the workshop by sharing in pairs recent moments of joy in our Quaker experience, and we reflected that we all need more joy, more time together, and more joy in our Quaker roles and tasks. The special working group shared five of the recommendations on which they have been working, and we discussed these in small groups. The five recommendations broadly comprise:-

- Communications and sharing of Meeting activities with each other
- Asking Area Meeting to share these updates each month via website and newsfeed
- Plan additional Meetings for Worship in the months when there is no Business Meeting
- How to support individuals in relation to action on climate injustice, and through collective action
- Asking Elders and Pastoral Friends to explore inter-visitation, and how to make Business Meetings more welcoming and accessible

The working group shared a chart showing three "pillars" – Faith in Action, Faith & Community and Services, and we discussed these in small groups. Friends were invited to create an "opinion line" showing how positive or negative they felt about the recommendations, and the responses were generally positive but with some wishing for a greater emphasis on involvement with Young People.

We thank the special working group for facilitating the workshop, which was a most enriching experience, and we look forward to taking the recommendations forward. Some work will take time, but we can also hope for some "quick wins".

2023.084 How the Truth has prospered at Barnt Green & Redditch Meeting

Christine Johnson has spoken to a report from Barnt Green & Redditch Friends informing us of how the Truth has prospered there recently. The report reads as follows:

- 1 *Meeting for worship has been held each Sunday*
- 2 *Attendance has increased in the past year*

- 3 *We recently held a Memorial Meeting for Mary Webb, a Member of this Meeting for many years. The Memorial Meeting was very well attended, and the many testimonies from those who had known Mary at various times in her life really showed us all how her life had spoken and had touched many other people's lives for good*
- 4 *We are showing films in the Meeting House to raise our profile in the local community*
- 5 *Study groups have been held at the Meeting House*
- 6 *We have hosted a session looking at the life and works of William Blake, which was well-attended*
- 7 *The Council of Christians and Jews were welcomed with a showing of the film "J'accuse"*
- 8 *In collaboration with local churches, weekly Coffee and Chat sessions were hosted at the Meeting House during the winter providing warm spaces and company. We are small in number but a number of local people volunteered to help and it was good to meet them and be part of a local initiative*
- 9 *The Quaker Service Memorial Exhibition was hosted over a weekend and will be shown again here over Remembrance weekend on Saturday 11th November and Sunday 12th November*
- 10 *We have installed a new noticeboard outside the Meeting House so that we can better advertise what is happening at the Meeting House to the local community*
- 11 *We have been invited on a couple of occasions to Friends' houses for lunch and we have also enjoyed shared lunch together at the Meeting House*
- 12 *We arranged a Barnt Green and Redditch away day at Woodbrooke in September, with a facilitator, Hilary Topp, to look together at what we feel positive about as a Meeting and how we might do things differently going forward. After lunch, Christine Johnson gave a talk about the history of Bournville, which was very interesting and informative*

Christine expressed gratitude for the support and guidance provided by the Support Group of five Friends. The support group has found the involvement with Barnt Green & Redditch Meeting to be rewarding and a privilege. The group is keeping its position under review but has no immediate plans to withdraw.

Christine noted that several new Attenders have joined the Meeting recently, but she felt that this was not directly as a result of the Meeting's outreach activities. Various views were expressed about effective outreach, and the Clerks plan to return to this matter at a future meeting.

We thank Barnt Green & Redditch Meeting for their report.

2023.085 Proposal for CEQ Responding to Racism (R2R) Research Project

We have received from the Responding to Racism (R2R) Group a proposal for a Research Project for our consideration and approval, and Donald Stubbings has introduced it. He reminded us of the Minute from our July Meeting 2023.061.

The project picks up on the second aim of the Group's Terms of Reference which is *to be a source of support and resource as to the history of our Religious Society and its links to colonisation, capitalism and the slave trade; and how our colonial and post-colonial history has affected us as individuals and as a religious body. To connect, in this, with other learning resources within BYM.* The Group wants to share this aim with members and attenders in Central England so that we can know who we truly were and be free to choose, guided by the Spirit, who we might hope to be. To this end the Group is proposing a research project to look at links in the Central England geographic area to the Slave Trade and associated trades in order to uncover how it was connected to past Friends in the Society.

The Group has considered three Research Models, which are detailed in the proposal, with pros, cons and potential costs. The preferred model is identified as Number 3, and the rationale for the choice is explained in the document. The project involves setting up a project management board, comprising volunteers and R2R members, which will meet with a Woodbrooke professional academic consultant in order to decide on the precise scope of the project and define the hoped-for outputs.

The timescales are set out in the proposal. It is difficult to predict what direction the project will take beyond the initial phase but the group will take stock in due course. The outcome will be shared with Area Meeting, and there will be a report.

The cost to CEQ will be £3,000 for the Woodbrooke academic consultant plus £1,000 for contingencies, expenses etc. Total £4,000 for one year.

We agree to support the proposal. Anne Ullathorne, Area Meeting Treasurer, has explained that the 2024 cost can be included in the Central Funds budget which will be brought to Area Meeting in November for discernment and approval. However, Area Meeting finances are finely balanced, and we must bear in mind the resources we need for other work.

2023.086 Quaker Support for Climate Action

We have received reports or calls for action from four sources:-

1 CEQ Climate Emergency Action (CEA) 2023 and plans for 2024

We were reminded of the Footsteps Energy Champion initiative that was launched at the Footsteps Tread Lightly Conference at the Al-Hijrah Mosque in November 2022, and for which CEQ agreed to include £4,000 funding in the 2023 CEQ budget. Early in 2023 it became clear that the recruitment of volunteer Energy Champions from faith communities was very challenging, and it was decided to terminate the initiative and incorporate the lessons learned in Footsteps on-going work on energy saving in the home. Part of the unspent balance of the budget allocation has been used to pay for more energy assessments. Subsequently the Esmee Fairburn Foundation has invited Footsteps and the national climate change charity Ashden to submit a joint project proposal for up to £200,000 funding (over three years) to support climate action by places of worship in disadvantaged communities in Birmingham. This proposal is due to be submitted in October 2023.

CEQCEA committee are planning a new programme starting in September 2023 through to Summer 2024 to engage local meetings with their gardens and support re-wilding where appropriate. They invite all Meeting Houses to undertake an audit and history of the plants in their gardens and build a story/memory landscape of each garden, with the hope of co-creating a booklet to celebrate our history of plants/ gardens in the Central England area. Friends are also invited to join in a number of practical workshops and visits that will investigate the ideas and practical methods of re-wilding/ investing in nature friendly methods of gardening.

2 Quaker Support for Climate Action (QS4CA)

Phil Laurie of East Kent Area Meeting has emailed details about a recently established WhatsApp Group called "Quaker Support for Climate Action", aimed at supporting those involved in Climate Action, which currently has about 200 Quakers in the Group. The Group has drafted a letter, which has been sent to all AMs and as many LMs as possible, inviting Meetings to witness to their commitment to sustainability and opposition to continuing oil and gas extraction. The Group held a number of vigils across the UK after Meeting for Worship during Quaker Week (23 September to 1 October) and the letter concludes "*it is our wish that vigils will continue to happen after Quaker week and we hope other groups will join with us in our witness*". Our attention has been drawn to the Quaker United Nations Office document "*A Government Official's Toolkit Inspiring Urgent, Real, and Equitable climate action*" a link to which is given in the papers for this meeting. We ask the Clerks to circulate the link and obtain a copy of the document.

3 Stop Ecocide

On 27 July an email was sent to AM Clerks by David George, Convenor of Hampshire and Islands AM Sustainability Action Group, encouraging Area Meetings to join with others in asking BYM (through Meeting for Sufferings) to issue a statement of corporate support for the Stop Ecocide International Campaign. We have shared a 10 minute video about the campaign, made by concerned Friends. The legal definition of Ecocide is given in the Area Meeting paper. The campaign calls for Ecocide to be a crime in international law, and the paper details the reasoning behind this campaign aim, and also addresses a concern that some Quakers may have that an ecocide law would conflict with the Quaker commitment to restorative justice. David George writes "*I am hoping that more Area Meetings will join Hampshire and Islands AM, Bristol AM, Pickering and Hull AM, Manchester and Warrington AM, Cornwall AM and Devon AM in sending minutes to Meeting for Sufferings asking that BYM issue a statement of corporate support for the Stop Ecocide International Campaign*".

We agree to send a Minute to Meeting for Sufferings, recognising that several other Area Meetings have already done so. We have been made aware of the FWCC conference in South Africa next year and note that FWCC has right of access to the United Nations. We hope that BYM will take this opportunity to promote the Stop Ecocide campaign.

We note that the Ecocide campaign targets the people creating the problem, and deserves our support, but we should be aware of the potential impact on developing countries.

4 Minute from Cotteridge LM (brought to Area Meeting in September 2023)

At our last meeting we considered a Minute brought to Area Meeting by Cotteridge Meeting on the subject of Quaker Witness & Action for Climate Justice, and the Clerk was asked to send the resulting Area Meeting Minute to Britain Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, urging them to make climate justice the central concern of the Yearly Meeting agenda in 2024. Friends today have been given an opportunity to offer further reflections on what we as Quakers can do to promote Climate Justice.

On a general point, we have been encouraged to consider the question “how can we exploit our strengths and reputation as Quakers to best advantage, working with other groups as appropriate”?

2023.087 Reports on the Witness at the DSEI Arms Fair from CEQ Friends

We have received very moving personal accounts on the Witness from six of the Friends who attended the “No Faith in War” day on 7 September 2023, which is held in the week running up to the fair while exhibitors deliver items and sales material. The reports include accounts of the Walk of Witness to the headquarters of arms companies, the Candlelit Vigil on the eve of the fair when Friends stood in solidarity with the Migrant Justice day as DSEI officially opened.

Friends also joined part of the Peace Pilgrimage from Oxford to DSEI. The experience of the pilgrims was captured in a podcast, alongside interviews with people they encountered on the way.

During the Meeting for Worship, which took place on a very hot day, several Friends were arrested for refusing to move out of the road as requested by the police.

One Friend observed that numbers were less than they were two years ago. One contributing factor was the spreading of the witness over 8 days, and some Friends would have been happier with a single event which would have maximised their sense of confidence and community. Several Friends expressed concern about a shouted briefing, including the injunction *‘do not speak to the police, the police are not our friends’*, which made Friends uncomfortable. As one Friend said *“how could we ask the police to honour our worship as they stood alongside us, hearing these words?”*. The slogan shouting during the Meeting for Worship made the witness feel more like a political protest than a worshipful Meeting to bring peace to a place of war.

There was joy in catching up with old friends from other faiths, and some Friends took part in a Taize service. One Friend mentioned some beautiful singing, possibly led by Quakers. Another noted that seeing the military hardware being driven past was chilling.

A Friend described the Walk of Witness from Friends House into central London as being very moving - calm, measured, positive. *“Handing out postcards to educate passers-by about DSEI felt like a piece of very important work; we could easily have given out five times the 1,000 that we had!”*

We also received an account of the Candlelit Vigil outside Excel Centre on 11 September organised by Quakers and Pax Christi, and involving over 100 people. The author says *“I left feeling privileged to have been able to witness alongside hundreds of others, and with a renewed sense of commitment to our Peace Testimony”*.

We are very grateful to those Friends who contributed to the reports, and to all those who carried out this very valuable witness in our name.

2023.088 Membership

(a) Deaths

We record the deaths of our Friends Jessica Mary Webb * (BGR), known as Mary, on 20 August 2023 aged 92, Marguerite Harris (SOL), known as Peggy, on 12th September 2023 aged 94, and David Pugh (SEL) on 22nd September 2023 aged 79.

** Note that Mary Webb's death was listed on the record sheet for September 2023 Area Meeting, but not recorded by Minute*

(b) Journey into membership

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Tina Vendrells Feliu (SEL) from Nessa Grimes (SEL) and Janet Blann (COT) and this has been read to us. We welcome Tina into membership of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and ask her visitors to welcome her and the clerk to write to her.

(c) Transfer In

We have received a request from Banbury and Evesham AM for the transfer of Bryony Yelloly 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

(d) Transfers Out Confirmed

We record the completion of the transfers out of the following Friends

- Helen Conner (BOU) to West Scotland AM August 2023
- Michael Darby (BOU) to Worcestershire and Shropshire AM September 2023

(e) Internal transfers

We note the following internal transfer: Helen Steel from BUL to COT

2023.089 Nominations

(a) Nominations Committee suggest

- Barbara Forbes (BUL) and Robin Bowman (BOU) to visit Elise Coblentz-Baumann on her journey into membership
- Sarah Evans (COT) to serve for a further year on the Westhill Endowment Trust from August 2023 to July 2024
- Fiona Campbell (COT) to serve for a further year as Children and Young People's Advocate from October 2023 to September 2024
- Helen Waters (SEL) to serve for a further year on Trustees Finance Committee from November 2023 to October 2024
- John Kimberley (BUL) to serve on Trustees Finance Committee from October 2023 to September 2026
- Wendy Burnett (BUL) to serve on Trustees Finance Committee from October 2023 to September 2026
- Anne Christie (BOU) to serve on Peacemakers Management Committee from October 2023 to September 2026

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

(b) Selly Oak Local Meeting Suggests:

- Clare Peat (SEL) to serve as a Pastoral Friend for three years from October 2023 to September 2026. This name being acceptable we appoint our Friend accordingly.

(c) Release from service

- Arthur Lockett (SEL) as a Pastoral Friend

- Robert Sprake (UNA) from Trustees Property Committee and the Lettings Advisory Committee

We thank our Friends for their service.

2023.090 Reminder: Area Meeting dates and venues in 2024

The Area Meeting co-clerking team has prepared a provisional calendar for Area Meetings in 2024 which was circulated in September. Since the last Area Meeting offers to host have been received for all of the dates except for March, though the offer to host the September Saturday is provisional, and other offers will be welcome.

Please send any further offers to Helen Waters in the office by 31 October 2023. We plan to share a finalised list of dates and venues before the November Area Meeting.

2023.091 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Barnt Green & Redditch and Cotteridge Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, at Bull Street Meeting House on 18th November 2023 (2pm-5pm) with agenda items to the Clerks by Monday 30 October 2023.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

James Bradbury, clerk this time

Suggested programme for Area Meetings in 2024 (update):

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	SUT	9 th
May	Wednesday	22 nd	1800-2100	SEL	7 th
June	Saturday	22 nd	1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business	COT	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	STO	10 th
October	Tuesday	22 nd	1800-2100	BOU	8 th
November	Saturday	23 rd	1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business	BUL	5 th
December					