



Roundabout Central England



The newsletter of Central England Quakers—Autumn 2023
centralenglandquakers.org.uk

Rewilding



Rewilding our Meeting House Gardens

Chris Martin reports on a new initiative from CEQ Climate Emergency Action (CEQ CEA).

Central England Quaker Climate Emergency Action is planning a series of visits and workshops to help us understand more about rewilding and to engage local meetings with their gardens. The first workshop was at Edgbaston meeting house on Sunday 24th September (pictured above) where Friends cleared the early leaf-fall and spread leaf-mould from last year.

Arms trade witness

Several Central England Quakers travelled down to the Excel Centre in London to witness and protest against this year's Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) biennial arms fair.

Friends joined the "No Faith in War" day during the week running up to the fair, while exhibitors deliver example items and sales material. A meeting for worship upheld a small number of Quakers and others who were blocking deliveries of weapons and other items—nine were arrested.

Friends also participated in a walk of witness to arms company headquarters, shining a light on these spaces that are hidden in plain sight. Short vigils were held at three sites and the testimonies of those with lived experience of war were read.

Two Friends from Bull St and Bournville joined sections of a peace pilgrimage travelling from Oxford Meeting House to DSEI. The pilgrimage provided an opportunity for creating inner peace and examples of peaceful community, alongside witnessing against the destruction of the arms trade.



These two groups of walkers joined together with others at a vigil on the eve of the arms fair. Many returned for further witness on the opening day of DSEI, in solidarity with migrant justice, which was the theme of the day (pictured above).

Despite worries around new laws affecting protest, and the challenges of holding gathered worship in these contested spaces, powerful witness was held.

We were able to shine a light on the darkness of the arms trade.

Read more about recent witness against the arms trade, for climate justice, and defending juries right to conscience, on the CEQ website: centralenglandquakers.org.uk

Sadly this trade continues, and another arms fair is due to take place in Telford on 2nd November. Central England Friends are invited to join local Quakers in witness. Read more at: bit.ly/stop-SDSC

Journey into membership for a Prisoner

A prisoner, serving a life sentence, recently applied to become a member of the religious Society of Friends, with the support of the local Quaker Prison Chaplain, Tricia Bradbury, and was warmly accepted into membership of CEQ area meeting on 19th September 2023. He had been visited by two Friends, following the usual Quaker practice.

In his application letter he wrote movingly about the spiritual journey which had led him to apply. He had experience of Quaker Meetings in three different prisons, and found solace within the small circle of chairs (with a candle brightly burning on the table in the middle with a copy of Advice & Queries) writing that his *'heart felt peace and love.'*

“For the first time in my life I felt as though I was being fully accepted for who I was.”



He is thrilled to now be a member, and a party was held in the prison to celebrate the event. Appropriately it was the end of Quaker week and on World Quaker Day. A talented Muslim chef had baked a special cake for the occasion with whipped cream icing and a large "Q" on the top (pictured above). Members of staff who knew the prisoner well came to the party which had a selection of delicious food and drinks.

Warwick Conversation Café

Gill Smith reports on conversation cafes at Warwick Meeting:



Warwick Local Meeting has been working with Catholics, Unitarians, Humanists and Bahais to help Ukrainian, Syrian and Afghan refugees develop English language skills. We all saw a need to befriend and help them to adapt to a very different life here.

It has been a rewarding experience for all of us and we have made many new friends.

Before the summer break, we volunteers were surprised by a feast of amazing home-made food from our friends from Ukraine!

We started the autumn term looking at the history of Warwick and the impact on the town of the Great Fire of Warwick in 1694.

Peace Award

During the Week of Prayer for World Peace in October this year, Lynn and Dave Morris of Stourbridge Meeting were awarded the Wilson/Hinkes Peace Award. This recognises their work as "Journeymen Theatre". Over the last 10 years, they have written, produced and performed many powerful and thought-provoking productions, covering a range of themes reflecting Quaker Concerns and Testimonies. The award also recognises Lynn and Dave's commitment to working for economic stability and educational development with the Seir Women's Co-operative in Palestine (with which Stourbridge Quakers have an informal twinning relationship.)

Coventry Quaker Meeting House Appeal

Quakers have had a Meeting House in Coventry from the 1600s. The current Meeting House was built in 1953. Our main room is on the first floor, making access a challenge.



Can you support our building improvement plan?

We plan to upgrade our building and make it fully accessible, for ourselves and for the many community groups that use it. The project is to:

- Install a lift to the main room.
- Remove the split levels on the ground floor.
- Upgrade the kitchen.
- Improve facilities, to include an accessible toilet and gender-neutral toilets.
- Subsequent internal redecoration.

Friends are working hard to achieve the £750,000 funds needed.

We are securing grants from various funders, but we need your support too. Can you help by contributing to this exciting project?

Donate by Bank Transfer: Account Name: Coventry Quaker Meeting (Ref MH Refurb). Unity Trust Bank. Sort Code 60-83-01. Account Number 20457523.

If you prefer to donate by cheque, via CAF voucher or CAF online, or if you wish to Gift Aid, please email us for details: covquakersdonate@gmail.com

We would particularly like to ask if Friends have any suggestions for fundraising as we are looking to raise enough of the target to be able to apply to funders who set a barrier of between 30 and 50% raised. All enquiries should be sent to the email above.

What's been happening in Western Uganda?

John Lampen reports on the recent activities of The Hope Project, and a visit to Uganda:

The Hope Project, a concern adopted by Stourbridge Local Meeting and supported by Central England Area Meeting, works with local community groups in Kasese District to encourage community work in peace, women's issues, and adult and nursery education. I visited each year from 1998 up to the outbreak of covid-19, sometimes accompanied by my wife Diana or another Friend from the Area Meeting. Several Local Meetings have given regular generous financial support, enabling us to send over £13,000 a year for teachers' salaries and building costs to the Ibanda Literacy Schools, and around £4000 to assist other projects.



Dinah, Chair of KADIWOD, front right.

For most of the time since 2003 our partners the Ibanda Literacy Schools (ILS) have had six nursery and adult literacy schools high in the Rwenzori mountains. Diana came with me in 2016 to see the new Adult Learning Centre in Kibirizi, constructed

with a legacy from my mother, providing workrooms where the literacy students from all the schools can learn income-generating skills. The schools were closed during the pandemic, but we paid the teachers to continue gardening, fish farming and construction work at the sites. One school withdrew from the group last year because of a personal dispute; I tried to mediate, but without success. I reviewed ILS's well-kept accounts and financial arrangements.

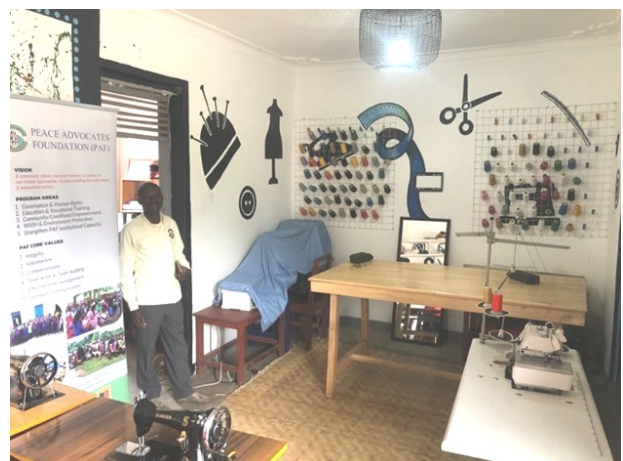
We now have around 300 children in the nursery classes.

And we have supported the Director Zelina studying for a degree in Community Development.

In 2019 two Quakers from Stourbridge Meeting, Julia Furminger and Judith Parkin, came with me to show women's and girls' groups how to make reusable sanitary pads. They returned in 2020 to train trainers for this, and we have had recent reports on how the concept is continuing and spreading. We sent a grant in June to one participant group, the Kasese District Women with Disabilities (KADIWOD), to enable them to carry the learning into remote parts of the district. Julia and a friend will return to Kasese (and Nairobi) to give further training early next year, and we hope to raise some extra funds to support this.

We have recently made our half-yearly payment of £6,500 to the Literacy Schools for salaries, so our funds are rather low at present. The next payment is due in December.

We stopped annual contributions to our other main partner Rwenzori Peace Bridge of Reconciliation (RPBR) by agreement with them after funding an extensive three-year programme to reduce violence at all levels in the District, which was independently evaluated and pronounced successful. The founding Director, Nelson Ndungu, has retired and his



Sewing workshop at PAF, Bukangara.

For more details of the projects, fundraising and accounts, please connect John Lampen: lampen@hopeproject.co.uk

post was taken by Noerine Muhindo; I have known her since she was a small girl and have much faith in her ability. Covid-19, our partial disengagement and Nelson's retirement all affected their funding and their opportunities for work in the community, and so their profile reduced. In 2019-20 we gave them some support for youth activities and to enable them to monitor the 2020 elections.

Then in 2022 we received an unexpected legacy of £10,000 which gave us a probably unique opportunity to enlarge the work for peace in this often troubled District. So I went in 2022 to revisit the projects I knew and consult with local people, including two former MPs who have been my friends for many years, before we decided where the money should go. It was clear that RPBR still had the ideas and experience to make a good contribution; so we decided to rebuild their capacity by giving them this money in annual tranches, and paying for a new car. They have sent us an initial workplan and interim reports. This plan will use up the legacy in three years, and we do not intend to use any of it to meet our regular commitments. So our fund-raising work continues.

Thanks to the generosity of our friends and the Quaker network, we are sometimes able to give some help to smaller ventures, particularly two orphanage schools which we have known and visited for many years. One created (with American help) a sewing workshop to train school leavers to support themselves, and is active in the SanPads programme. They also



Lab equipment in use.

made two fabric panels for the Quaker Arts Network (UK) Loving Earth Project. We paid transport costs for laboratory equipment for a secondary school near Kasese Town from the charity LabAid. So I wanted to photograph it in use. I found that

the school buildings had been largely destroyed by floods, but they were carrying on with persistence and enthusiasm in some dis-used mine-workers' housing.

All this work meets important needs on a modest human scale.

Our partners are deeply grateful to everyone in the UK who contributes. Thank you all.

West Midlands Church Leaders Summit

Rhiannon Grant reports on the recent meeting of church leaders held at Woodbrooke 1st – 2nd October.



Our group picture gives you some idea of the diversity of people who attended this event - church leaders from Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, URC, Salvation Army, and other churches, and me to represent Quakers in Central England. We were also joined by people from national ecumenical bodies, including Mike Royal, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, who was able to fill the group in about challenges and successes in their work. We didn't dwell on the differences between our churches, although they were acknowledged.

We focussed on what we have in common and what we can learn from each other.

We prayed together, in several different styles, and talked about questions like: How can we best use the resources we have, such as church buildings and meeting houses? How can we work together to speak out on ethical issues which matter to us, such as welcoming refugees and addressing the climate crisis, especially with a general election approaching? How can we develop confidence in our communities to talk about our faith in public? Since many of these questions remained unanswered, we also agreed to meet again next year!

Nominations: Prayer, Realism, Integrity & Love

Claire Bowman reflects on a recent nominations gathering at Woodbrooke:

On Saturday the 23rd of September 19 Central England Quakers gathered at Woodbrooke for a day focusing on Nominations. This is at the spiritual heart of Quakerism - a group of Friends meeting to discern the best people to fulfil roles, not just because the work needs to get done but seeking to place people into situations that will develop them and give space for them to bring their creativity and enthusiasms to flourish.



Roy Stephenson, who came to us from Lancaster Meeting, based the day around Quaker Discernment and wrote a paper on discernment for the event. Roy has had a concern for Quaker nominations for over 20 years and was clear that the best way to define discernment is to break it down into sections: Prayer, Realism, Integrity and Love.

Prayer brings us close to God so that we can understand together what is really wanted. Realism is needed because it's important to know about the Friends you are considering - what effect the role might have on them and their loved ones if they take it on. You have to know about their personal situation. Integrity goes with Truth but is more important in Roy's view. It's no good telling the truth if it's going to be too painful for a person to receive. Truth can be very different for different people. It's wiser to interact with integrity, the foundation of wise eldership. Love is the foundation of everything, as it says in the Bible.

You may be very clever but unless you do things with love it means nothing.

Roy told us that you don't even have to like or know someone to love them - to want the best in life for them and to work to make them happy. As the day drew to an end Roy told us a story, which can be seen as a parable for the nominations process.

"God was concerned because he felt that people weren't listening to him, so he held a meeting for clearness with the angel Gabriel. People talk about me, he said, but they have stopped talking with me. "Yes" said Gabriel, "people talk to each other". And God said "So if I become one of them then they'll talk to me..." He sent Gabriel to Nazareth to a good woman there but she refused to bear God's son. "My husband has been away for months. If I become pregnant how will I explain that to him? He will cast me out". So Gabriel went to another house to a woman called Rachel. "But I am far too old! How would I cope with a child at my age?" The angel was desperate - but there was an open door and a very young woman inside who had never been with a man... And the rest is history..."

Hard Work, Much Progress at Pardshaw

William Waddilove shares news of the Pardshaw Summer Work Camp in August 2023:

Pardshaw, near Cockermouth in the Lake District, is one of the oldest Meeting Houses in the country. George Fox visited it twice. It has subsequently been a YHA hostel, an independent hostel and a national Young Friends centre from the 1960s. Having fallen into disuse, it is now being refurbished by some of the same but 'slightly older' young friends on an annual work camp and other shorter activity weekends.



Pardshaw is an interesting property: it offers much potential as well as very many challenges.

The carriage shed, on one side of the road, was once used as the hostel. One of the complications was that the toilets were the other side of the road and people's expectations got higher! It was closed in 2006 when it was vandalised by youths. It is now used as a workshop.

We had, even before this year's Swarthmore Lecture, taken on board the concern for accessibility and have been doing what is 'reasonably practical' but there are many challenges. The main site is quite steeply sloping. To make access easier to the school room there is now a very gently sloping wooden boarded ramp inside the entrance. Further on there are two wooden steps and beside them a handrail and bench. Step free entrance (with portable ramp) is through the stable door and has a steep slope.

The whole building is made of rough stone walls so to drill or make a hole involves a lot of work and the whole place is a Grade 2* listed building, so we are limited in what we can change.

We have two main improvement projects. I am more involved with the School room. This used to be a rather scruffy junk-filled room with a very uneven floor and rather dominating table that was close to falling to pieces, which it did as we tried to move it! Our vision is to convert it into an accessible multi-use room suitable for small meetings and group use but also as a simple holiday flatlet, thus continuing the simple accommodation that has been the spirit of Pardshaw for the last hundred years

We now have a smooth floor, an almost completed kitchenette in the corner and various tables, benches and seating earmarked. Walls have been painted, woodwork gloss painted, with the metalwork painted in black so all is starting to look smart.

The open fireplace, retaining the historic coal fire grate, has been covered over. We could restore it in due course. In the meantime we will use electric fan heaters. In the long term we may install an air source heat pump (a lot of money!) although, before then we may fit a



Rowan working on the kitchenette.

wood stove. (Carbon neutral and zero 'energy' miles as all wood grown just outside the door).

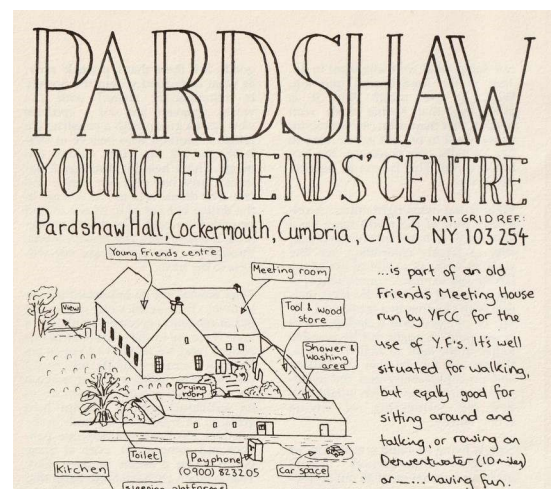
The windows need attention. Beside cleaning, tidying and painting they need curtaining for privacy and energy conservation. The shutters on the roadside need the gutter brackets moving so they can open.

The other project is the reinstatement of the bricked-up north door to the large meeting room with a path to give greater accessibility. Lots of money and not a very quick job. Look out for the appeal leaflet. Perhaps by then we will have tidied up the weathered coach house front together with the repair of several broken windows.

There is plenty of work for everyone. Book this as your Lake District holiday.

No overnight charge for all those who come and work unless, like me, you wish for a hotel bed! You can hire the place if you just want to stay - at very reasonable overnight rates:

pardshawquakercentre.org.uk



Advert in the 'Young Friend' magazine in 1989

Notices & Dates for your Diary

Bournville Lunchtime Concerts

A Bournville Lunchtime Concerts are soon to start up again! All concerts take place on Fridays at Bournville Quaker Meeting House, 65 Linden Road, Birmingham, B30 1JT, starting at 1pm, and last for approx. 40 minutes.

Upcoming dates

Friday 3rd November - Paul Carr (organ)

Friday 17th November - Christopher Hill (flute) and Amy Butler (piano)

Friday 1st December - Keith Hearnshaw (organ)

Friday 15th December - James Brawn (piano)

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

Friday 15th December 7pm—Ealing Comedy about oddball criminals and an octogenarian landlady.

Weds 27th, Thurs 28th, Fri 29th December 7pm—Series of three time-travel comedy films about returning to the future

Barnt Green Friends are also interested to see if there is the demand for films and shared meals on Christmas Day and Boxing Day when many people are alone. Feedback would be welcome – please contact John West.

Visit another meeting Sundays

At recent CEQ events the need to build fellowship by worshipping with other Meetings has been a recurring topic of discussion. Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group would like to suggest an informal intervisitation plan in response to this need.

5th Sundays in a month are extra Sundays – let's use them! Let's call them... Visit-Another-Meeting-Sundays.

And on the following Sundays in (the rest of) 2023 and 2024 encourage Friends and Meetings to go visiting:

29th October 2023

31st December 2023

31st March 2024

30th June 2024

29th September 2024

29th December 2024

The Quaker Service Memorial Exhibition

You are welcome to join us this Remembrance weekend to view the exhibition.

2:30—4:30pm Saturday 11th & Sunday 12th
November

at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House, 6
Sandhills Lane, Barnt Green, B45 8NR

Designed to be displayed separately from the Stone Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, the exhibition explores the history of the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) and Friends Relief Service (FRS).

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

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