

# **Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bull Street Meeting House and online on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

Clerk: James Bradbury Assistant Clerk: Paula Button  
Elders: Wendy Burnett, Richard Pashley

## **2024.001 Worship and memorial minutes**

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of our Friend Gillian Bryan (BOU) on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023, aged 82. We also heard two memorial minutes showing the grace of God in the life of Sara Packer, prepared by Friends at Cotteridge and Hall Green Meetings.

## **2024.002 Representatives**

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

The clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today:

Pete Doubtfire (BUL)  
Terry Stanley (BUL)  
Brenda Tanner (BUL)  
Arthur Cooper (COT)  
Alison Iboro Offong (SEL)  
Fran Wilde (SEL)

## **2024.003 How the Truth has prospered at Bull Street Meeting**

We have received a detailed report from Bull Street Meeting informing us of how the truth has prospered over the last year.

Bull Street Friends have continued to meet regularly throughout the year, with blended meetings becoming a successful routine.

During the year a number of younger Friends and Attenders have been regularly attending Meeting for Worship, and this will hopefully continue.

The practice of individual Friends selecting and reading a passage from QF&P on occasional Sundays has continued and is both enlightening and enriching.

The regular reading of Advices and Queries remains an integral part of Meeting for Worship. This remains an important framework within which Friends try to live their lives, and continue to inspire as a form of spiritual witness.

Bull Street Friends hosted the Churches and Industry Group – Birmingham and Solihull Retail Chaplaincy AGM for a third year, and held Heritage Open Day where the main exhibition was from the Quaker Memorial Trust. The Meeting also hosted an Area Meeting wide discussion on the revision of QF&P where members of the Revision Committee gave an update and answered questions. Some Bull Street Friends attended Pray Brum 24 at St Chad's, and some Friends attended one of the final performances of Journeymen Theatre at Bournville Meeting House. During Advent they had a shared lunch and also had what has come to be called 'Mince Pie Sunday' on 17<sup>th</sup> December.

We are pleased to read such an encouraging report, and are very grateful to the Meeting for their willingness to host two Area Meetings each year.

## 2024.004 Membership

### (a) Deaths

We record the death of our Friend Gillian Bryan (BOU) on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023 aged 82.

### (b) Journey into membership

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Elise Coblentz-Baumann (BUL) from Barbara Forbes (BUL) and Robin Bowman (BOU) and this has been read to us.

We welcome Elise 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) Transfers Out

John and Marian Sheldon (WAR) to Pendle Hill AM

Tony Green (BOU) to Worcestershire and Shropshire AM

### (d) Internal transfers

We note the following internal transfer: Edward Creasy from WAR to BOU

### (e) Resignations

The following Friends have expressed a wish to resign their membership:-

Glanwyn Morgan (BGR)

Geoff Hilton (BGR)

Dora Jackson (COT)

Friends/elders are clear that this is appropriate and so we accept their resignations and ask the clerk to write to them.

## 2024.005 Nominations

### (a) Nominations Committee Suggests:

- Huw Davies (HAL) to serve as a Trustee for the triennium from January 2024 until December 2026
- Huw Davies (HAL) to serve on Trustees Finance Committee for the triennium from January 2024 until December 2026
- Julia Furminger (STO) to serve as an Area Meeting Nominations Committee co-clerk for the triennium January 2024 to December 2026
- Christine Johnson (BGR) and Paula Button (WAR) to visit Georgie Thomas on her Journey into Membership
- Keith Hitchcock (SUT) to serve on Trustees' Property committee, from February 2024 to January 2027
- Clare Peat (SEL) to serve on Christmas Parcels Committee, from February 2024 to January 2027
- Lyndon Thomas (WAR) to serve as an AM Trustee from February 2024 to January 2027.
- Lee Gunn (COV) to serve as our representative to Quaker Life Representative Council for 3 years from February 2024 to January 2027.

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

We hope that Lee Gunn will be able to attend the next Quaker Life awayday, and we confirm that the costs of attendance will be fully funded by Area Meeting.

### (b) Solihull Local Meeting suggests:

- Caroline Gibbs to serve on Area Meeting nominations committee.

### Stourbridge Local Meeting suggests:

- Rosalie Rider to serve as a pastoral Friend
- Marina Manassei to serve as an elder

- Nicholas Paton Philip to serve on Area Meeting Nominations Committee

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly

**(c) Release from service:**

- Virginia Wollaston (STO) as an elder
- Dave Morris (STO) as a pastoral Friend
- Huw Davies (HAL) from Trustees Employment Committee
- Andrew Rigby (COV) from Area Meeting Nominations Committee
- Janet White (SOL) from Area Meeting Nominations Committee
- Anna Lyon (WAR) as our representative to Quaker Life Representative Council
- John Ironside (SEL) from Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee

We thank our Friends for their service.

## **2024.006 Minute of Record: Order for Burial/Internment/Scattering of Ashes**

We record that the ashes of William Whiting were scattered in the garden of Stourbridge Quaker Meeting House on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2023

## **2024.007 Meeting for Sufferings**

A report from our Meeting for Sufferings representative will be brought to our next Business Meeting but in the meantime our attention has been drawn to some guidance on working with Meeting for Sufferings which many Friends will find useful. A link to the guidance is given in the Area Meeting papers.

## **2024.008. Revision of Book of Discipline**

The book of discipline revision committee have two draft chapters, nominations and marriage, available for comment, as part of a consultation exercise. The draft chapters and a form for comments and suggestions are available on this webpage <https://quaker.org.uk/resources/quaker-faith-and-practice/revising-quaker-faith-practice>

A particular query is whether the terms of the Quaker Marriage Declaration should require both parties to state that they will be loving and devoted partners with *“God’s help or with Divine assistance”* – as it does at present

**This is an important issue - Local Meetings and individual Friends are encouraged to study this material and participate in the consultation by offering discernment, using the form provided.**

Friends can also suggest ideas and specific passages for inclusion in the new Book of Discipline.

Although the clerks are not presently planning a sharing of views at Area Meeting level, we will be pleased to receive Minutes from Local Meetings on this topic, via the CEQ Office.

## **2024.009. Quaker Christmas Parcels 2023 Report**

Howard Saunders, on behalf of the Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee, has reported on the 2023 parcel packing experience. This is an interim report, as the QCP report and accounts for 2023 will be brought to Area Meeting in March.

Some 1019 parcels were packed and distributed at a cost of approximately £18,800 (£18.50/bag), however, as in the past, the ordering of goods was not straightforward.

In recent years The Committee has relied largely on Aldi and Sainsburys for the supply of most of the goods, but in 2022 Aldi decided that they would no longer be able to help and in 2023 the Committee relied almost exclusively on the Selly Oak branch of Sainsburys. As detailed in the report, there were

various logistic and administrative problems affecting the deliveries from Sainsburys, but the impact was mitigated by the personal intervention of the Branch Manager and the cheerful co-operation of another member of staff.

The support from CEQ volunteers was greatly appreciated, and the stacking, packing and distribution seemed to go especially smoothly.

The publicity given to fundraising and the recruitment of volunteers worked well in 2023 with income of £17,378, up 17% on 2022, and with approximately 50 volunteers.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the exercise is the involvement with other agencies, and associated outreach. One community payback worker began to ask questions about Quakers and was pleased to receive a copy of Advices and Queries and details of a Meeting close to her home.

A recent meeting with Probation showed how appreciative the Service is of this scheme.

We thank Howard Saunders for his report, and express our gratitude to all those Friends involved in making the scheme a success.

## **2024.010. Central England Area Meeting Nominations Annual Report for 2023**

During 2023 Area Meeting Nominations Committee has continued to hold blended meetings which has ensured good attendance although sometimes the technology has been challenging. They will continue to hold blended meetings in 2024.

They have been grateful for the knowledge and expertise of the Principal Officer during 2023 and for the help and support of the Office Administrator.

Overall, it has continued to be difficult to find Friends who are prepared to serve on many of our committees although the Committee has managed to fill essential posts.

A Nominations Committee Away Day, on the theme of “discernment” was held at Woodbrooke attended by most of the AM Nominations committee and some Friends from Local Meeting Nominations Committees.

As we move into 2024, Local Meetings are asked to try to ensure that they send a representative to our Area Meeting Nominations Committee meetings to share their local knowledge of Friends or attenders who may be willing to serve on our many and varied committees. Area Meeting Committees are reminded to regularly consider their Terms of Reference, to send updates of these to the Area Meeting Office, and to consider succession planning, especially for clerking roles.

Nominations Committee Co-Clerks are happy to be consulted about forthcoming vacancies and the skills that are required. Friends who are interested in serving the Area Meeting in any way are encouraged to speak to a member of the Committee or one of its Co-Clerks. Likewise, if a Friend realises that someone in their Local Meeting may be suited to serving Area Meeting in some way, they should speak to a member of Area Meeting Nominations Committee.

Rather than appointing representatives to AM Nominations Committee, Cotteridge LM’s internal Nominations Committee members are going to attend AM Nominations Committee in rotation, and this is a possible way forward if no representative to the AM Committee can be found.

We thank the Committee for their report. We note that at the end of 2023 Janet Blann came to the end of her second triennium as a Co-Clerk and we thank her for her service.

## **2024.011. Redditch Meeting House**

On behalf of CEQ Trustees, Sarah Barker (Principal Officer) has provided a report on the status of Redditch Meeting House, and a proposal for its future.

The report gives a brief history of the Meeting House and the change of use which occurred in 2007, when it ceased to be a Place of Worship and was leased to Worcestershire County Council. Following the termination of the lease by the Council in 2014 it has been used as a Dance School since 2015. Difficulty in finding a suitable tenant meant that full market rent has not been achieved in recent years. The current lease, to Amelia’s Dance Academy, is due for renewal in Summer 2024.

Over the last 8 years the cost of operating and maintaining the property has exceeded the rental income, and the “status quo” is not tenable.

A recent asset appraisal report, from KWB Property Management, estimated the market rent for the property to be approximately £12,000-14,000 per annum (we currently receive £7,500). If the property were to be offered on the open market for sale KWB estimate a guide price of £175,000 for the freehold interest with incumbent tenant. The current tenancy has a mutual 6 months break option, so vacant possession could be obtained quite quickly, making the property suitable for investors or owner occupiers.

If the property was sold for residential development it may achieve a higher price depending on density of the development permitted and if the sale contract was conditional on gaining planning consent.

The KWB report notes that the introduction of minimum energy efficiency standards over the next few years is going to require investment by commercial landlords to improve the energy efficiency of buildings so that they comply, and this property would require significant investment to achieve compliance.

In its summary Sarah Barker's report states:

*“Whilst some Friends may feel a strong personal connection to Redditch Meeting House and its history it is no longer used for Quaker worship, nor is it offering outreach or services to the community which are aligned to the Society. It has not been used for Quaker meetings for 17 years and it is not providing a good investment return”.*

These issues have been considered at meetings of Trustees Property Committee and CEQ Trustees. Property Committee recommended to Trustees that the Meeting House should be disposed of. Trustees asked Property Committee *“to prepare a paper to present to AM explaining the situation with Redditch MH which results in us wishing to dispose of this property. Redditch MH is no longer used for Quaker purposes and the costs of its maintenance are prohibitive”.*

We have considered that paper today.

**We feel guided to pursue the disposal, and to give our approval to Trustees in principle.** We recognise that there are sensitivities involved, but hope that these can be dealt with informally through the BGR support group.

## **2024.012. Edgbaston Meeting House**

When Edgbaston Local Meeting was laid down, the vision was that the Meeting House would become a hub for the local community. Today, a small number of regular hirers use the building and car park, with Priory Rooms providing management for this. However, the income from these lettings does not cover costs, which include energy bills, insurance and property/lettings management.

As a result, Trustees would like to consider alternative uses for the property, including the option to identify a single tenant willing to lease the building on an exclusive basis. The paper presented at this meeting identifies a potential tenant (Rogue Play), and Trustees have asked Area Meeting for guidance on two aspects:-

- 1 Given that the “status quo” is not financially viable, is Area Meeting willing for Trustees to consider alternative uses for the property, including establishing an exclusive lease with a tenant such as Rogue Play?
- 2 Is Area Meeting willing to allow Trustees some discretion in negotiating a rent that may be below market value, in order to secure a lease, provided that the overall lease package is financially viable?

We understand that the tenant will be responsible for maintaining the interior of the property and the grounds.

Area Meeting likes to see its functional properties used for community purposes. Trustees will investigate the classification but we hope that the Meeting House can remain “functional”. We give our approval to the two questions raised by Trustees

## 2024.013 Online Contribution Schedule

The Contribution Schedule enables Friends to contribute to their Local Meeting, Area Meeting, a variety of Area Meeting concerns and projects and BYM using just one payment. Gift aid (if applicable) is recovered by the Contributions treasurer and added to the donations. Until now the Schedule has been “paper based”. We have been briefed about the new online Contribution Schedule, accessed via the CEQ website, which “goes live” on 1 February.

The aim of the new scheme is to increase contributions by making the Schedule more accessible to donors, and hopefully the launch will help to raise awareness of the scheme.

For those Friends who prefer to stay with the existing paper-based schedule, this will run in parallel with the new scheme for the time being.

All existing donors will receive a letter before the “go live” date of 1 February 2024, and new donors will be invited to register for the online Contributions Scheme from this date. In both cases detailed instructions on how to register and donate will be provided.

We hope that those attending Area Meeting today will inform their Local Meetings about the new scheme. Contacts for questions about the scheme are Bob Morris (HAL), Stephen Holt (WAR) and James Bradbury (STO).

## 2024.014 George Fox 400

2024 marks four hundred years since the birth of Quaker co-founder George Fox. The occasion has become known as Fox@400 and around the world events ranging from online courses to international gatherings will be reflecting on Fox’s life and legacy. Friends World Committee for Consultation has created a calendar providing details of what is going on throughout the year ([fwcc.world/event/fox](http://fwcc.world/event/fox)).

Within Central England Area Meeting, there will be a George Fox 400 Celebration Day on Saturday 25 May 2024 at Hartshill Local Meeting. Hartshill is the closest Quaker meeting to Fox’s birthplace in Fenny Drayton, Leicestershire, and the village has links to his early life. Central England Area Meeting will also be holding a devotional Area Meeting at Hartshill Local Meeting on Saturday 17 August 2024. There are also plans for a Churches Together pilgrimage between Cotteridge, Bournville and Selly Oak Meeting Houses. Other events being held are listed in the Area Meeting papers.

For more details on all of these events again see [fwcc.world/event/fox](http://fwcc.world/event/fox)

If your Local Meeting is planning to reflect on Fox@400 in some way, please send details to the Central England Quakers office ([admin@ceaqm.org.uk](mailto:admin@ceaqm.org.uk)).

Peter Ullathorne is a Trustee of FWCC and informs us that a study guide will be available from March, to be circulated and put on the Newsfeed. The Celebration Day on 25th May is a Hartshill LM event (not just CEQ) to welcome Friends from across the area, and even further away. Their exhibition will be open. Other Arts and Crafts activities may be happening. Hartshill may be able to support transport to Fenny Drayton if required. A walk up to Firbank Fell in celebration of the anniversary, with perhaps a stay at Swarthmore Hall as a CEQ away visit, is being considered, and we ask that if the event is confirmed it is published as a notice at a future Area Meeting.

Woodbrooke have other resources and courses available. We suggest that this is an opportunity to introduce Quakers to others as positive outreach and we encourage all Local Meetings and indeed all individual Quakers to do this.

## 2024.015 Request from Children and Young People’s Committee

The Children and Young People’s Committee would like Local Meetings to respond to the following:

- 1) How many families within the Meeting are interested in an Area Meeting-wide trip to adventure play centre Conkers on Saturday 20 April 2024? The cost of entry would be covered.
- 2) What activities would children and young people within the Meeting like to take part in? This could be anything from where they would like to visit or activities they would like to do with other Quakers.

3) How does your Meeting recognise milestones in the lives of your children and young people? From birth to adulthood, what do you do to mark these transitions, from home visits to giving books to other forms of celebration?

Please share your responses with Area Meeting co-clerk Rae Ritchie ([AMClerks@ceaqm.org.uk](mailto:AMClerks@ceaqm.org.uk)) by 5 March 2024.

### **2024.016 Reflections on Quaker Week Activities**

The Area Meeting Clerks ask that Local Meetings prepare a short statement about their activities during Quaker Week 2023. What did the meeting organise? Was the intention to nurture the life of the meeting, be a form of outreach or both? How did you organise this? What was attendance like? What lessons did you learn from it? This input will help to shape planning and preparations for Quaker Week 2024, which the Clerks would like to put on the agenda at Area Meeting in July 2024. Please submit your statement to the Central England Quaker office by Tuesday 5 March 2024.

### **2024.017 Calendar of Area Meetings 2024**

A calendar of Area Meetings for 2024 has been produced as a coloured A4 sheet for display on noticeboards. Copies have been distributed with the Area Meeting papers and at Area Meeting.

### **2024.018 Thanks and next meetings**

We thank Bull Street Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. We hope to meet again should nothing occur to prevent:-

Saturday 17th February 2pm, Devotional Area Meeting, with singing, followed by refreshments, Coventry Meeting House

Wednesday 20th March 6pm (meeting for business), Hall Green Meeting House

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

James Bradbury, clerk this time