

# **Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Hall Green Meeting House and online on 20th March 2024**

Clerk: Paula Button Assistant Clerk: Anne Ullathorne  
Elders: Mina Tilt, Geoff Braithwaite  
Pastoral Friends: Huw Davies, Trevor Barker and Celia Morris

## **2024.019 Worship and memorial minutes**

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the deaths of our Friends Joy Evans (WAR) on 29th January 2024 aged 96; Barbara Groombridge (WAL) on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 aged 86; Ram Krishan (COV, not in membership), husband of Eleanor Nesbitt, on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024 aged 92; and John Ironside (SEL, not in membership) on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024 aged 79.

We also heard two passages from Quaker Faith and Practice, 27.10 and 26.61.

## **2024.020 Representatives**

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

The clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today:

Richard Begg (SUT) and Michael Muzzafar (HAL)

## **2024.021 How the Truth has prospered at Hall Green Meeting**

We have received a report from Hall Green Meeting informing us of how the Truth has prospered over the last year. The report reads as follows:

### **Worship**

The main challenge this year has been to maintain the numbers regularly attending Meeting for Worship and the energy of the congregation. Between six and twelve Friends regularly attend worship on Sunday which is below pre-Covid numbers but is a slight improvement on the last two years. We miss the presence and regular ministry of our Friend Michael Langford who is now house-bound but we have been able to arrange short Meetings for Worship at his home. Similarly, our Friend Eva Lorimer is only able to come on very few occasions to MfW but we keep in touch with her by regular phone calls and visits. We have very few visitors although Michael Muzaffer who is also member of the local Ahmadiyya Community joins us regularly on Sundays and it was through this contact that some Friends attended their Eid celebrations. Our monthly Meetings for Healing and shared lunches continue with most Friends staying on after Meeting for Worship on the appropriate Sunday to share food together. Our ministry has been enhanced by the box of snippets from Quaker Faith and Practice as Quaker seeds. The two or three occasions on which we have met to tend the garden have enhanced our fellowship.

We used our network of support to keep in touch with Friends and are confident that the community of the Meeting remains relatively strong. However, we are conscious that we place significant responsibility on a few key individuals. We tried to be more creative in our nominations process but regrettably found we had to be pragmatic and most Friends have served more than one triennium in their posts. We would certainly welcome the stimulus that fresh faces and ideas bring.

## Area Meeting

We were represented at most Area Meetings during 2023 and some of our congregation have attended the special Area Meetings. We have been represented regularly at Area Meeting Nominations Committee and our members have participated in the Low Carbon Commitment Group, Elders' and Pastoral Friends' events and other events and conferences. Hall Green Friends have served on Finance, Employment, Peace Hub and Property Committees and as Area Meeting Trustees. Our Meeting House manager played an important part not only in ensuring that the revenues from lettings are back at pre-Covid levels but also as Treasurer of the Christmas Parcels' Scheme

## General

We are very pleased that our premises are used so much for community use and welcome followers of a range of different religions - Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu – as well as our own Christian worship.

## 2024.022 Membership

### (a) Deaths

We record the deaths of our Friends Joy Evans (WAR) on 29th January 2024 aged 96; Barbara Groombridge (WAL) on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 aged 86; Ram Krishan (COV, not in membership) on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024 aged 92 and John Ironside (SEL, not in membership) on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024 aged 79.

### (b) Journey into membership

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Georgie Thomas (BGR) from Paula Button (WAR) and Christine Johnson (BGR) and this has been read to us.

We welcome Georgie 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 in

We note the following transfers in: Stephen Petter (BUL) from Staffordshire Area Meeting and Tim Holmes (HAR) from East Cheshire Area Meeting. We accept these requests and ask our Clerk to issue a certificate of acceptance and to welcome our Friends into membership of our Area Meeting.

## 2024.023 Nominations

### (a) Nominations Committee suggests:

Sandra Berry (BOU) to serve as an Area Meeting Trustee for the triennium from March 2024 to March 2027

Sandra Berry (BOU) to serve on Trustees Employment Committee for the triennium from March 2024 to March 2027

Janet Blann (COT) to serve on Trustees Employment Committee for the triennium from March 2024 to March 2027

Ruth Livermore (KIN) to serve on the Susanna Cole and Others Trust for the triennium from March 2024 to March 2027

Barbara Forbes (BUL) to serve on Peace Hub Management Committee for the triennium from March 2024 to March 2027

Cathy Khurana (SUT) to serve on Clerks Advisory Committee for the triennium from March 2024 to March 2027

Stella Roberts (COV) to serve on Clerks Advisory Committee for the triennium from March 2024 to March 2027

To attend Junior Yearly Meeting 2024 two names

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

**(b) Coventry Local Meeting suggests:**

Pete Duckworth (COV) to serve on Area Meeting nominations committee from April 2024 to March 2027.

**Bournville Local Meeting suggests:**

Ralph Wallin (BOU) to serve as a Pastoral Friend from April 2024 to March 2027

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

**(c) Release from service:**

Eleanor Jackson (BOU) as an Elder from 1st April 2024

We thank our Friend for their service.

## **2024.024 Quaker Christmas Parcels 2023**

We have received a report from the Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee. There has been very good feedback from the recipients and the probation service. One thousand and nineteen parcels were distributed before Christmas. We should be very proud of this unique scheme which helps not only the probation service, but also the offenders who learn that there are people who care about them. Two-thirds of the income comes from within Area Meeting and Friends are encouraged to continue supporting this very worthwhile scheme. We heard read a letter sent to John Ironside, thanking him for his services as Treasurer and logistics manager for which we are also very grateful as we are to all the Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee.

## **2024.025 Meeting for Sufferings**

We have received two reports from the December and March Meetings of Meeting for Sufferings which are filed. The Book of Discipline Revision Committee is asking for comment on the precise wording of the marriage declaration. Some concerns were expressed and we expect that our Area Meeting will return to this at a later date.

The report of the group to review Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings was also received, recommending a merger so that there are four meetings of BYM each year, but representatives may still be requested. We are concerned that the new arrangements may need more effort and also Friends attending may not be sufficiently well prepared. We know that Meeting for Sufferings is representative of the whole Yearly Meeting geographically

We are reminded that we should all complete the Quaker Service Information forms to help Yearly Meeting Nominations. We thank our representatives, Claire Bowman and Margot Williams for their report, and we send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

## **2024.026 Tabular Statement Report**

We have received a report from Helen Waters outlining the main findings following the preparation of the Tabular Statement for 2023 which has been sent to Yearly Meeting. This shows that, at 417, there are eight fewer Members than the 425 reported last year. There are 203 recorded adult attenders, which is ten less than last year. There are also 42 children under the age of 16, one less than last year. Lists are more realistic now. This may be one reason why the numbers appear to be so much in decline. Those on the unattached list have been contacted and filled in consent forms. Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group are very aware of this and will keep it on their agenda. There are various, often personal, reasons why people ask to be on this list. The tabular statement has been helpful in some Meetings in clarifying their numbers. It was noted that there is a need for more outreach in our Area Meeting. Discovering Quakers is a new initiative which we encourage Meetings to join. We thank our Friend Helen Waters for her work on our behalf.

## **2024.027 How the Truth prospered in Local Meetings in 2023**

Every year we ask our Local Meetings how the Truth has prospered among them. These returns are used to form part of our annual report to the Charity Commission. A booklet sharing these reflections in full has been made available, while Helen Waters has created a summary of themes. It is recommended that more up-to-date Meeting photographs are used in future. It is also a good idea to ensure that new people are encouraged to become involved in areas of interest and concern. A 'Warm Welcome' is an idea for Meetings to consider as a way of welcoming people.

We are encouraged and inspired to hear of the work which is happening in our Local Meetings. We also recognise the challenges that Local Meetings face and will continue to discern ways to address these issues.

## **2024.028 Quaker Week and World Quaker Day**

The Area Meeting clerks asked Local Meetings to share details about what they did for Quaker Week in 2023 and all responded. Helen Waters prepared a summary of these responses showing the range of activities, including a focus on Heritage Open Days rather than Quaker Week.

The theme for Quaker Week 2024, which runs from 28th September to 6th October 2024, is the same as last year: Simple. Radical. Spiritual. Resources will be available to order from July. More information is available at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/communities/outreach-and-witness/outreach>.

World Quaker Day is a worldwide event, which is held more in other parts of the world than in the UK, particularly East Africa. We ask Local Meetings to consider their plans for this Autumn's Quaker Week over the next couple of months, bearing in mind that this is also the year of Fox@400, which may provide additional opportunities to share the Quaker way with their communities. What would their Meeting like to do? What does their Meeting feel they have the capacity to do? Is there an opportunity for Local Meetings to work together in clusters to offer a programme of events? Would Friends like to see an Area Meeting-wide coordinated plan for Quaker Week?

Please share your Local Meeting's response by Tuesday 7th May 2024.

This is the summary of Quaker week responses 2023:

The responses from Local Meetings about Quaker Week have been combined into a single narrative as follows:

Quaker Week 2023 ran from 23rd September to 1st October with the theme of 'Simple, Radical, Spiritual'. 1st October was World Quaker Day organised by Friends World Committee for Consultation, FWCC, with the theme of 'Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with Hope to God's Call to Cherish Creation and one-another'. Free outreach resources including posters, badges, tote bags and T shirts were available for Local and Area Meetings to order from BYM and The Friend produced a special Outreach Edition. FWCC produced a short video on the theme of World Quaker Day.

Some Local Meetings used the theme of Quaker week and the resources available for a range of different activities. Two Local Meetings mention ordering copies of the special Outreach Issue of The Friend for distributing to Friends, attenders and visitors to the Meeting House. Several Local Meetings ordered the free badges, posters, tote bags and T shirts available from BYM - Friends from Warwick Meeting wore the T shirts while working in the space they have created for the local community and Hartshill Meeting mention that the badges have been very popular!

Some Meetings used the theme of Quaker week as a basis for discussion or reflection. Warwick Meeting held a discussion amongst Friends about what being a Quaker means to us. Stourbridge Meeting used their Facebook page to post daily on the themes. These posts included images, Quaker facts and a gentle challenge to reflect upon and respond to these individually.

Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting organised an outreach session including the screening of the first 30 minutes of "Quakers, the quiet revolutionaries", an opportunity to ask questions and refreshments.

Warwick Meeting had planned to hold Meeting for Worship on the Sunday in the garden but in the event it was not warm enough. Several visitors joined them for the first time on that day and have returned to worship with them.

In Coventry Meeting, one of the Elders contacted all the Friends she could who don't regularly attend Meeting for Worship, to offer a Friendly greeting and ask if they would like to come on the first Sunday of Quaker week. They are not aware of anyone who responded to her contact this time, although in previous years they have seen people turn up for a usually one-off visit.

Cotteridge Meeting marked World Quaker Day by organising a World Quaker Day breakfast for the 1st October on the theme of "Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with Hope to God's Call to Cherish Creation and one-another". They watched the video from FWCC and responded to it. There were about 15 people there and it was an event for Cotteridge Friends only.

Friends from Bournville, Cotteridge, Selly Oak and Solihull Meetings worked together to organise a silent vigil for Climate Justice on World Quaker Day on Bournville Green. Three members of Solihull Meeting travelled to Cotteridge Meeting and walked down with Friends to Bournville Green, carrying placards to support Climate Justice. Information about Quakers was available to be given out to interested members of the public.

Some Local Meetings did not plan any special activities for Quaker Week. Heritage Open Days ran from Friday 8th September to Sunday 17th September, just before Quaker Week, so some Local Meetings focused on those instead. Bull Street Local Meeting and Bournville Local Meeting opened for Heritage Open Days and hosted the Quaker Service Memorial Trust Exhibition and Stourbridge Local Meeting had a display of craft work produced by members of the Meeting including the children's meeting.

## **2024.029 Thanks and next meeting**

We thank Hall Green Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Saturday 27th April at Sutton Coldfield Meeting House. There will be a workshop from 10.30-12.30pm (arrivals from 10am). The workshop is entitled "Our Area Meeting – developing and shaping our future together." Over lunch there will be an activity around sustainability and the business meeting will begin at 2pm.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Paula Button, clerk this time