

# Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Cotteridge Meeting House and online on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2024

Clerk: James Bradbury Assistant Clerk: Paula Button  
Elders: Sue Thompson, Anne Ullathorne  
Pastoral Friend: Leonora Wilson

## 2024.057 Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard a passage from Quaker Faith and Practice, 25.02

*Our planet is seriously ill and we can feel the pain. We have been reminded of the many ways in which the future health of the earth is under threat as a result of our selfishness, ignorance and greed. Our earth needs attention, respect, love, care and prayer.*

*In comfortable Britain we are largely insulated from the effects of the environmental crisis. It is the poor of the world who suffer first.*

*As a Religious Society of Friends we see the stewardship of God's creation as a major concern. The environmental crisis is at root a spiritual and religious crisis; we are called to look again at the real purpose of being on this earth, which is to till it and keep it so as to reveal the glory of God for generations to come.*

*It is a stony road ahead but our faith will uphold us; the power to act is God's power which is mediated through each of us as we give and receive support one from another. We can all listen if we will to the sounds of the earth, tuning into it with joy.*

*London Yearly Meeting, 1988*

## 2024.058 Representatives

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

The clerks welcome the following Attender joining us today: Willemina Morton

## 2024.059 How the Truth has prospered at Cotteridge Meeting

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

*We have been asked by the Area Meeting to share the main activities of our Meeting during 2023. We are asked to include how our Meeting has flourished during the past year as well as any important challenges which we have faced, and things we may have done to overcome them.*

*How our Meeting has flourished:*

- Meeting for worship - we have a regular Meeting for worship, well attended by both children and adults, with a children's group of about 6 children. We are glad to have a Meeting with a large age range and hope to create an intergenerational community where all feel welcome. Our gathered Meeting for worship is precious to us and we would like to help each other find ways into the stillness so that we can become faithful Quakers, finding the ways of God.*

- *We have been pleased to welcome some newcomers to our meeting and are working to make sure they are integrated into our community.*
- *The depth of our Meeting for worship and our community are enhanced by sessions before Meeting for worship and deep conversations afterwards over a cup of tea. We also enjoy our regular all age shared lunches and our monthly coffee mornings add to our pastoral work. We also have a number of small groups meeting in people's homes. We have a regular group of Friends who meet to discuss the joys and challenges of ageing.*
- *Warm Welcome - established in October 2023, it has been slow to attract people. This has now evolved to become a monthly Create and Connect event on the last Wednesday of the month. All are welcome for craft and companionship. Warm drinks and light refreshments are provided.*
- *Spending time together in 2023 both in worship and in other ways - all age gathering at Purley Chase, Woodbrooke where you are - Ministry, Worship and After Word, Saturdays to share together.*
- *Our regular newsletter enables us to keep in touch with future activities.*
- *Our garden continues to give us great pleasure.*
- *Several Friends in our Meeting support Talking Friends and this commitment to inclusive practice is appreciated.*

*Challenges:*

- *We find it difficult to find enough people willing and able to give service to our community. We have found ways to reduce the number of formal appointments and reduce the required length of service.*
- *We are without a warden and are discerning the right way forward both for the maintenance of our Meeting House and for our bungalow.*
- *We continue to try to improve the technical ways of accessing our meeting including for those with hearing impairments.*
- *Our children's group has a wide age range and it is sometimes difficult to support those at both ends of the range at the same time.*

## **2024.060 Reflections and discernment from the morning's workshop**

The theme of the workshop, facilitated by the Responding to Racist Group, was "Climate Change is Racist", which is the title of a book that is highly recommended reading. We were reminded that the Restore Nature Now walk was taking place in London today. We started by watching three short videos featuring the Nigerian activist Vanessa Nakate, at Davos in 2020, COP27 in 2022, and Paris in 2023. Vanessa was famously edited out of a photograph of her standing alongside four white activists before the photograph was released to the media. Vanessa made the key point that although Africa is the least emitter of carbon it is the most affected by climate change. After we discussed the title of the book in pairs, the members of the R2R group shared their personal thoughts about the book with us. The planning group had devoted a lot of time to preparation, meeting four times, and had found the journey valuable. Some members of the group had initially had reservations about the link between Racism and Climate Change, but were pleased with the outcome of the workshop.

Some of the points made were that Racism and Colonialisation, which have caused so much damage, link with almost all of our Quaker Testimonies, including Equality & Community, Truth & Integrity, Stewardship of the Earth, Simplicity, and Peace. Maps of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and vulnerability to climate change demonstrate the disparity between the two. There are three types of racism, personal, institutional and structural and we learnt about the "empathy gap" where we were encouraged to step outside our boxes and make the connection.

This presentation was followed by a further discussion in larger groups, and a feedback session.

In a closing session we were challenged to consider what we are called to do. Friends were encouraged to visit the Zero Hours website, with an appeal for asking local candidates to support the Climate and Nature Bill: <https://www.zerohour.uk/>. It is very easy to join the petition. Friends also made cards to send to our local MP when elected, and origami birds made from a sheet of paper with relevant texts of our choosing. We were also able to take some wildflower seeds (sufficient to populate a square metre) to plant in suitable spaces, hopefully without destroying any rare species.

In the period of reflection this afternoon we were reminded of the need for having safe and brave spaces to share feelings, and that the process of discernment is not linear. Also, given that greed is at the heart of the problem, our testimony of simplicity is very important.

We thank the R2R group for organising the workshop.

*Post-meeting note: Vanessa Nakate is Ugandan not Nigerian*

## **2024.061 Minutes from Local Meetings**

We have received the following Minute from Bull Street Meeting:-

*It has been brought to our attention that mid-week Meeting is small in number and it may not be viable to continue the Meeting in the long term. We are reminded that mid-week Meeting is there for everyone, and it is hoped that numbers remain sufficient for the Meeting to continue.*

Mid-week Meeting at Bull Street is on Wednesdays at 12.45 for 30 minutes.

## **2024.062 Yearly Meeting 2024**

The Area Meeting Clerks are planning to create two WhatsApp groups for Quakers from Central England attending Yearly Meeting at the end of July: one for those joining via Zoom and one for those attending in person to allow Friends to co-ordinate travel plans, perhaps meet for coffee or meals, etc. Instructions for joining either group (by WhatsApp or email) are set out in the Area Meeting papers.

## **2024.063 George Fox 400**

On Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May, Hartshill Quaker Meeting hosted an open day for Friends to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Fox's birth. Around fifty people came along, from Belper in the north to Cheltenham in the south. At least four Area Meetings were represented. There was a wonderful atmosphere, with some people staying from mid-morning to late afternoon. Many joined the Quaker heritage walks around the villages of Hartshill and Fenny Drayton. Visitors also enjoyed the two exhibitions, one about Fox's life and one about Hartshill's Quaker history, as well as refreshments. Hartshill Friends would like to thank all who attended and made it such a wonderful day for them too. They would also like to thank their Local Meeting clerk, Clare Barnett, for all her work in putting the event together.

The following future events are currently planned. Details available to date are published in the Area Meeting papers.

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July** - Programmed Meeting for Worship with readings of George Fox, Warwick Meeting House, 10.30am

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July** - Fox 400 "Pilgrimage" and "Nudges and Winks" concert, 1pm to 6.30pm beginning and ending at Selly Oak Meeting House. This is a "Quaker-led" event organised in conjunction with Birmingham Churches Together, aimed at both celebration and outreach. A flier with full details has been widely circulated. All Friends (members and attenders), families and friends of Friends and members of other local churches are welcome. The event is free, but participants are asked to register so that the organisers have some idea of numbers.

Selly Oak Friends are planning to offer a light meal between the pilgrimage and concert, and would welcome donations of food (savoury and sweet) from Friends across the AM. Friends are asked to email [sellyoakquakers@gmail.com](mailto:sellyoakquakers@gmail.com) with any offers.

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August** - Devotional Area Meeting, Hartshill Meeting House

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September** - outreach event and film show at Barnt Green Meeting House,

For the rest of 2024 "George Fox 400" will be a recurring agenda item at Area Meetings, and we ask Local Meetings planning events to inform the CEQ office of their plans. Further details will be published as they become available.

**Stourbridge books:** Stourbridge Meeting has copies of the original editions of George Fox's Journal and Epistles, the Collected Works of William Penn, and Besse's Sufferings of the People called Quakers, with a few other early Quaker books. If any other Meeting in Central England Area Meeting would like to borrow any of these for an exhibition, please write to the Stourbridge LM clerks at [stourbridgequakers@gmail.com](mailto:stourbridgequakers@gmail.com)

## **2024.064 Friends acting under concern**

The trial of four Friends from Central England Area Meeting for action at the Telford Arms Fair 2023 has been postponed and we understand that a new date of 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025 has been set. Friends are reminded that their support is still needed, and that they can join the Whatsapp group for updates (details are given in the Area Meeting papers).

The SDSC Arms Fair UK 2024 is at Telford International Centre on 6<sup>th</sup>, & 7<sup>th</sup> November, and Jo Hindley has asked for practical and moral support with a protest. Further details will be communicated via the WhatsApp group.

Two Just Stop Oil campaigners, one of whom was our Friend Rajan Naidu, sprayed coloured powder on Stonehenge near Salisbury, Wiltshire, on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June. We are pleased to learn that neither the stones nor lichen were harmed. We uphold Rajan at this time. We will return to a discussion of the methods of expressing protest at a future Area Meeting.

*Post meeting note: The date of the SDSC arms fair has now changed to 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> November*

## **2024.065 Meeting for Sufferings Report for Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024**

We have received a report from Claire Bowman on the Meeting for Sufferings meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> June, which Claire noted was the last in the current triennium. Some of the key points from the report are:-

Minutes from Area Meetings –

- South Wales, encouraging Area Meetings to sign up to Stop Ecocide International.
- General Meeting for Scotland on the matter of Indefinite Imprisonment for Public Protection, noting that the framework for dealing with offenders is different in Scotland.
- London Young Adult Friends concern about the government's Consultation on Gender Questioning Children.
- Sussex West Area Meeting's concern about the difficulties that Yearly Meeting Trustees have faced following their decision to recommend that this year's Salter Lecture should not take place at Friends House during Yearly Meeting

Later in the meeting the new clerk to Trustees, Marisa Johnson, spoke about the abuse which she feels that Trustees have personally received on account of doing their work, such as over the

cancellation of the Salter Lecture due to concern about the consequences of having Jeremy Corbyn as a speaker.

With regard to the Quaker Marriage Declaration, the matter is still at Area Meetings for consultation.

The Quaker Concern over Population which was formed after Britain Yearly Meeting's Canterbury Commitment in 2011, has generated some controversy, with some members of Young Friends General Meeting being concerned about the name of the group.

A large part of the afternoon was taken up with consideration of Quaker work in Palestine and Israel where Quakers have been actively working since 1934. A paper was presented by Stephanie Hart, Middle East Programmes Manager, about the UK Quaker involvement in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme. There has been much trauma to deal with since 7<sup>th</sup> October for both the ecumenical accompaniers and the staff who assist them. A Friend has reminded us of the dangers of using language such as Apartheid and Genocide, which conflate current events with events in history. Also of the fine line between legitimate criticism of the Israeli government and anti-Semitism. Many Jewish people in UK are feeling under threat.

Claire concluded her report by saying that she is thankful to have been asked to serve as the Central England Quakers' representative on Meeting for Sufferings. She wished the new reps, Margot Williams and Nicholas Paton Philip, joy and fulfilment in their roles.

We thank Claire Bowman for her service as our representative. We are aware of the changes being proposed to central structures and the concerns that these have generated. We uphold our new representatives as they start their service on Meeting for Sufferings at a difficult time, and also support those going to Yearly Meeting where these matters will be raised.

## **2024.066 Reports of Ecumenical and Interfaith Work**

The booklet which has been tabled today has been created from a large number of inputs, and is a very comprehensive audit of current activity - even though it is 24 pages long, reading it is well worth the effort. We thank the individual contributors, and are pleased to note that all of our Local Meetings have provided reports. We also thank Helen Waters, Business Support Administrator, for compiling and editing the booklet.

The first 19 pages are reports from individuals working with other churches and faiths on specific committees or groups, or who have been involved in particular events.

- Claire Bowman: Ecumenical and Interfaith Coordinator
- Rhiannon Grant: CEQ Representative on Birmingham Church Leaders group
- Chris Martin: Footsteps: Faiths for a Low Carbon Future
- Hilary Johnson: Pray 24hr Brum
- Hilary Johnson: Council of Christians & Jews
- Sarah Evans: Westhill Endowment Trust
- Jim Green: Black Country Urban Industrial Mission
- Meg Harper: WorkCare West Midlands
- Pete Doubtfire: Peace Pilgrimage for Gaza
- Pete Doubtfire: Freedom for All Seder
- Pete Doubtfire: Christians at Pride

In her report Claire Bowman notes that there are Friends dotted around our Local Meetings who are members of Churches Together groups or Interfaith groups but each operating within the context of their local area and perhaps not thinking much about relating what they are doing to the rest of the Area Meeting.

She observes that:-

*If we were to tell each other more about what we have been doing we could learn from each other's experience and encourage each other. Getting to know people from other faiths and denominations shouldn't threaten our own spiritual orientation. Rather we should be strengthened on our journey by having to explain to others what we think, do and believe and potentially enrich our own practice by learning about the expression of their religious background. Besides, there are issues which we all face, such as climate change, on which we all agree. Care for the planet is central to all the major faiths. How much stronger our presence will be to bring about mutually desired change if we all work together.*

Hopefully the publication of this booklet is a step towards addressing this concern.

It is encouraging to see individual Quakers not only participating in ecumenical and interfaith organisations but in many cases taking leadership roles. We need to make sure that as these Friends seek to be released from service other Friends are encouraged to come forward to continue the good work.

The final 5 pages of the booklet are reports from Local Meetings, most of whom are active in their local Churches Together Groups. Some of the reports demonstrate that this form of outreach is more about giving people of other faiths accurate information about Quakers and their form of worship as it is about encouraging people to follow our way. This was emphasised when Warwick Meeting took part in a Faith Trail, and came across some serious misconceptions about Quakers and their worship. In one case a Local Meeting has been discouraged from being part of Churches Together due to a member church objecting to our lack of a creed, but this seems to be a minority problem, and most Quaker Meetings are made welcome. It is heart-warming to note that many Meetings are not just maintaining relationships with other churches and faith groups but working with them actively on local projects and concerns, also that Meeting Houses are used to host meetings and events. It is of interest that one Meeting in particular engages actively with faith groups that hire rooms at the Meeting House. It is also good to see that Chaplaincy is recognised as a key part of the way we work with other faiths for a common purpose.

We have been reminded about "Faith in the Future" published in 2016 which encouraged Quakers to work collaboratively, appreciating that we can't do everything on our own.

Hilary Johnson referred to the questions in her Pray 24 Brum report, and she hopes to be released from this work soon. Anyone interested in taking up the role should speak to Hilary about it. With regard to her Council of Christians and Jews report, she is willing to continue for a further year.

Not all of the roles are AM appointments, but we need to value them, and perhaps create a new category of roles that are not mandatory but supported by Area Meeting.

Chris Martin spoke about the Birmingham Faiths Climate Action partnership, and we ask Chris to prepare a short briefing paper for our next meeting.

Finally, we should celebrate the work which is being done, and we thank all those who are doing it in our name.

## **2024.067 Membership**

### **Transfers out accepted**

We record the completion of the transfer out of Jonathan and Lucy Collinson (COT) to York Area Meeting

## **2024.068 Nominations**

### **Nominations Committee suggests:**

Fran Wilde (SEL) to serve on Peacemakers Management Committee for a triennium from July 2024 to June 2027

Alison Ironside (SEL) to serve on Bursaries Committee for a triennium from July 2024 to June 2027

Roderick Keefe (COT) to serve another triennium on Peace Hub Management Committee from July 2024 to June 2027

Alistair Dow (BUL) to serve another triennium on Peace Hub Management Committee from July 2024 to June 2027

Jim Green (WAL) to serve another triennium as a trustee of the Black Country Urban Industrial Mission from June 2024 to May 2027

Julia Furminger (STO) to attend Sibford Quaker School's General Meeting 2024

Lee Gunn (COV) to attend the Future of Quakerism conference 18-20<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Rae Ritchie (HAR) to attend the Future of Quakerism conference 18-20<sup>th</sup> October 2024

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

## **2024.069 Reminder – Outreach**

At the July Area Meeting, we hope to explore the topic of outreach with our Local Development Worker, Hilary Topp. To help Local Meeting representatives prepare for this, we ask Local Meetings to consider the "Outreach Queries" that have been circulated to all Local Meeting Clerks, and to share their responses with their representative(s) for the July Area Meeting. Written responses or Minutes are not required.

## **2024.070 Thanks and next meeting**

We thank Cotteridge Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. Also, Chris Martin for supervising the "tech". We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> July at Warwick Meeting House at 6pm. Tea will be served from 5pm.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

James Bradbury, clerk this time