

# Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Warwick Meeting House and online on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Clerk: James Bradbury, Assistant Clerk: Rae Ritchie  
Elder: Jane Beale, Pastoral Friend: Ann James

## 2024.071 Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard a passage from Quaker Faith and Practice: 28.10

*Many of the people who come to us are both refugees and seekers. They are looking for a space to find their authenticity, a space in a spiritual context. It is a process of liberation. Some discover what they need among Friends, others go elsewhere. This gift of the sacred space that Friends have to offer is a two-edged sword. It is not easy administratively to quantify; it leads to ambiguity. It demands patient listening; it can be enriching and challenging to our complacency. It is outreach in the most general sense and it is a profound service. It may not lead to membership and it may cause difficulties in local meetings. But if someone comes asking for bread, we cannot say, sorry we are too busy discovering our own riches; when we have found them, we'll offer you a few. Our riches are precisely our sharing. And the world is very, very hungry.*

*Harvey Gillman, 1993*

## 2024.072 Representatives

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

The clerks welcome Robert & Nancy Wafula from Kaimosi, Kenya. We also welcome the following Attenders joining us today:

Sue Wilding (STO), Fran Wilde (SEL)

## 2024.073 How the Truth has prospered at Warwick Meeting

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

*Meeting for Worship on Sunday morning continues to be blended and is attended by between 15 and 30 Friends. We have been pleased to welcome some new attenders during the year. We also hold an additional Meeting for Worship on Sunday evening which is held on Zoom. We agreed to lay down Kenilworth Worshipping Group at the end of June due to dwindling numbers. We hold our Children's Meeting generally once a fortnight and this is attended by 4 to 6 children. Our 4 young people regularly attend the Area Meeting Youth Group and Summer School or Senior Conference which they enjoy and where they can create links with the wider Quaker Community.*

*We continue to develop the spiritual life of the Meeting through our regular Meetings for Learning and our Bible Study Group. One example of the Meetings for Learning was a Friend sharing her experience and information about a Woodbrooke weekend course on Spirituality. The Bible Study group have studied women in the Bible and considered the text of 1 Corinthians. The monthly meetings of our group "Preparing for Change in Old Age" also continues and the group has invited external speakers for example from the local hospice. We have good links with other local religious groups and this year the Meeting House was a stop on the Warwick Faith Trail when we had the opportunity to share how we worship and an introduction to our Testimonies.*

*Our Meeting House and garden provide spaces which we enjoy sharing with the local community. The well-supported Conversation Café has been running for over a year, organized by the local Catholic, Unitarian and Quaker churches. Those who attend come from a number of communities including Afghani, Syrian and Ukrainian. Rooms in our building are regularly hired by a wide range of local groups with interests in natural history, literature, music and art as well as counsellors and pilates/yoga instructors.*

*The use of the building is complemented by the garden and the community café. The garden is maintained by a group of volunteers with some support from a professional gardener. It is much appreciated by those who visit and relax there. The community café continues to open on weekday mornings and provides a valued meeting place in the Warwick community.*

*We have two flats one of which was let to a Ukrainian family until earlier this year. We are working with the local authority to let it again to refugees or asylum seekers.*

We are pleased to note that the second flat is now let to two refugees.

## **2024.074 Outreach**

Hilary Topp, Local Development Worker, has facilitated a discussion on the theme of Outreach, and we have also considered proposals for extending the remit of the existing Area Meeting Communications Committee to include Outreach.

The aims of the discussion, as set out in the Area Meeting papers, were:-

- Sharing what we understand 'Outreach' to be and what forms of outreach are important to our local meetings.
- Explaining the aims of the new "Outreach and Communications" Committee
- Exploring how the new committee could best support and network with local outreach activity.

Background information published in the AM papers included the history of the former AM Outreach Committee and the reasons for laying it down in 2023, some Outreach "Queries" which were circulated to Local Meetings to stimulate preparation for the discussion today, and relevant recommendations from the "What Does Love Require of CEQ" Special Working Group.

A Outreach

We started by thinking of a few words which for us capture Outreach, then shared our words briefly in pairs.

The words included *reaching out, visible, personal, sharing, conversations, community, creating opportunities* and *challenge*. We know that Friends find it difficult to "blow their own trumpet".

We then discussed in small groups of around six the Outreach Queries printed in the papers, and considered three specific questions:-

- What form of Outreach is most important to your meeting?
- What simple and/or fun things could your meeting do to be a more outreaching community?
- What would be most helpful to your Meeting in terms of central support?

A number of themes emerged from the groups' feedback. Challenges are plenty, from too many different websites, lack of energy within Local Meetings, especially smaller ones, and the difficulty of sharing Quaker beliefs.

At the same time, lots of outreach is already happening, from film showings to conversation cafes to concerts. We also heard about outreach activities outside of Central England Quakers, such as visiting other places of worship and then inviting them to join a Quaker Meeting for Worship.

One group spoke to a need for a central committee to provide support for Local Meetings, which extending the remit of Communications Committee to include outreach will hopefully provide. Requests for support included advice on going into schools and support with improving IT skills, events such as Quaker Quest to share Quaker values, and information packs for newcomers and attenders.

There are also actions that Local Meetings can take to improve outreach: visual communication such as posters in public spaces like universities, ensuring better signage for Meeting Houses and staying

abreast of what's happening in other meetings. Most importantly, Friends need to talk to visitors after Meeting for Worship, and strive to provide a real genuine welcome, with lots of tea.

As individuals, we represent a vital outreach channel too. Outreach is, it was repeated, about personal engagement. When opportunities arise, we can let people know we are Quakers, and why, emphasising that of God in everyone. Carrying a few copies of Advices and Queries at all times can help too.

The clerks have gathered all of the written feedback created during the session, which they will take away to digest and share with the Outreach and Communications Committee. We will return to this important topic again in future, but in the meantime, we would like to thank Hilary Topp, Local Development Worker, for guiding our discernment in today's session.

## B Outreach & Communications (O & C) Committee

Claire Bowman outlined the thinking behind the decision to restructure the Communications Committee to include Outreach. The previous Outreach Committee felt isolated and unsupported and there was a view that "Outreach is for everybody". However, there is scope for some central coordination and support (as discussed earlier).

We have considered the terms of reference for the new "Outreach and Communications" Committee, and are happy to approve these. We endorse the suggestion of encouraging Local Meetings and Branches to appoint an O & C Friend, or group of Friends, to help develop local O & C activities, and to facilitate networking between Local Meetings, Branches and the O & C Committee for that purpose. We ask the O & C Committee to consider linking with the monthly National Outreach Zoom meeting, facilitated by Naomi Major.

## **2024.075 Local Development Worker report**

Hilary Topp, Local Development Worker (LDW), has spoken to her report which is published in the Area Meeting papers. We feel that it gives us a very good flavour of what she does. She has explained how she fits into the overall BYM structure. She started her role in November 2022 and covers 5 Area Meetings. She is part of a team of Local and Youth Development Workers across Britain, that have the freedom to follow their interests and play to their strengths. The main part of her role is working with Quaker communities to help them flourish, through phone calls, visits, conversations, away-day sessions, workshops and events. She enjoyed being part of and supporting the "What does Love Require of CEQ" Special Working Group and she notes that some other Area Meetings are undertaking similar work. She has worked with Trustees, Pastoral Friends and others, sharing ideas and thinking about different approaches. The role is a mix of proactive and reactive.

Hilary notes that there are fewer Children's Meetings than there were, and many are getting smaller. It is increasingly important to make connections between them so that children and families feel part of a wider community. She has enjoyed attending meetings of the CEQ Children's and Young People's Committee and the Committee are busy planning a Quaker Families Weekend for 2025.

She has been running Peer Support sessions on Zoom in collaboration with the LDW for Yorkshire - the dates for which are on the CEQ website.

Hilary feels supported by her own Meeting which respects the difference between her role as LDW and being a member of the Meeting, which she appreciates.

We thank Hilary for her report, and for her work, enthusiasm and inspiration.

## **2024.076 Bursaries Committee report**

Bursaries Committee aims to provide financial support to enable Friends of all ages to develop their understanding of Quakers through attendance at Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering, Senior Conference, Junior Gathering and various courses to help Friends progress their spiritual journeys. The support is mainly, but not exclusively, linked to Quaker related activities and events.

The procedure for applying is set out in the report.

We encourage Pastoral Friends and others to mention in Local Meetings that this help is available to enable Friends to broaden their experience of the Quaker way. This is particularly relevant to families wishing to attend a residential Gathering or course.

In addition to bursary support, Area Meeting provides full funding for the cost of training courses (internal or external) for Friends *undertaking specific Quaker roles*, appointed via the Area Meeting nominations committee. The procedure for applying for this funding is set out in the report.

More detailed guidance is available in the 'Funding for Friends and Attenders' document available at <https://centralenglandquakers.org.uk/policies/finance/>

## 2024.077 Yearly Meeting 2024

As recorded at our last meeting in June, two WhatsApp groups have been created for Quakers from Central England attending Yearly Meeting – one for those joining via Zoom and one for those attending in person. Instructions for joining are set out in the Area Meeting papers.

## 2024.078 George Fox 400

Warwick Local Meeting held a semi-programmed Meeting for Worship on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July, with readings from George Fox's Journal and passages from him in Quaker Faith & Practice. A cake was baked using a 1652 recipe.

The "George Fox 400 Pilgrimage" on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July was a successful day, with around 50 Friends and members of other churches (including Mike Royal, a Pentecostal Bishop and General Secretary of Churches Together in England CTE) taking part in the walk, and a similar number attending the "Nudges and Winks" concert in the evening. Highlights were:-

- at Selly Oak Meeting House, an excellent introductory talk by Stuart Masters, plus a musical accompaniment by the Wal Warmington trio to texts chosen and read by a Selly Oak Friend
- the reading of some of George Fox's words by the Bournville boating lake arranged by Cotteridge Meeting
- at Bournville Meeting House, a George Fox in costume reading from his journal, and being presented with a birthday card by the children (with a rendition of Happy Birthday to you).
- The delicious refreshments generously provided by Selly Oak Meeting
- The concert given by Mark Waistell on the theme of Advices and Queries, illustrating some of the basics of Quakerism and how they apply to life, which was enjoyed by both Quakers and the members of other churches.
- The active participation of children over the day

Feedback has been very positive, with one Local Meeting writing to Selly Oak Friends:-

*The experience of chatting and relaxing with other Friends - some of whom we hadn't seen for a while, or only seen fleetingly at Area Meetings or the like - in the beautiful surroundings of your Meeting House, was something we'll all treasure for a long time.*

We thank all those Friends who organised this event and helped on the day, and we appreciate the support provided by Birmingham Churches Together.

Details of the various other local events planned to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the birth of George Fox are described in the Area Meeting papers, and an A4 poster of events has been circulated to Local Meetings for distribution and display.

Events outside CEQ are listed on the FWCC website (see AM papers for a link).

## 2024.079 Friends acting under concern

The trial of four Friends from Central England Area Meeting for action at the Telford Arms Fair in November 2023 has been reset for 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025. Friends are reminded that their support is still needed and that they can join the Whatsapp group for updates:

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/CLOs2wAvR2rG4fDcZNdQZ8>

*Post meeting note: This link has changed, contact Jo Hindley if you wish to join this group.*

The SDSC-UK arms fair will be held at Telford International Centre on 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024. There will be a "Peace Pilgrimage" from Malvern to Telford, walking in witness against the SDSC-UK arms fair, which is open to all. For details visit: <https://peacepilgrimage.org.uk/>

## 2024.080 Nominations

### Nominations Committee suggests:

Carole Pannell (STO) to serve as a trustee for another triennium from October 2024 to September 2027

Gill Smith (WAR) to serve as a trustee for another year from January 2025 to December 2025

Gillian Waddilove (COV) to serve on Trustees Employment Committee for another year from October 2024 to September 2025

John Kimberley (BUL) to serve on Trustees Employment Committee for another triennium from October 2024 to September 2027

Rae Ritchie (HAR) to serve on Children and Young People's Committee for another triennium from September 2024 to August 2027.

Sue Wilding (STO) to serve on Communications Committee for a triennium from July 2024 to June 2027 (to be renamed Outreach and Communications Committee)

Susan Steadman (COT) to serve as a Talking Friend Trustee for another triennium from September 2024 to August 2027

Sarah Evans (COT) to serve on Westhill Endowment Trust until December 2024

Jim Green (WAL) to serve as a Priory Rooms Director for another four years from July 2024 to June 2028

Janet Blann (COT) to serve on Oak Tree House Advisory Committee for another triennium from October 2024 to September 2027

Marina Manassei (STO) to serve on Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee for another triennium from September 2024 to August 2027

Stella Roberts (COV) to serve on the Susanna Cole and Others Trust for another triennium from October 2024 to September 2027

Claire Bowman (BOU) to serve on Birmingham Church Leaders' Group from July 2024 to June 2027.

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

### Release from service:

Rhiannon Grant (BOU) from Birmingham Church Leaders' Group. We thank our Friend for her service.

## 2024.081 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Warwick Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. Also, Gill Smith for supervising the "tech".

We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on 28<sup>th</sup> September at Stourbridge Meeting House. There will be a workshop (details to be advised) from 10.30 am to 12.30pm, followed by lunch, then Area Meeting from 2pm to 5pm.

On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August there will be a Devotional Area Meeting at 2pm at Hartshill Meeting House. The Meeting House will be open from 11.30am for those wishing to view the Fox@400 exhibition and Hartshill Quaker history exhibition or undertake a self-guided walk of Hartshill Quaker heritage sites. Lunch will be available from 12.30pm, with Meeting for Worship from 2pm until 3pm. Drinks will be available afterwards.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

James Bradbury, clerk this time