

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Stourbridge Meeting House and online on 28th September 2024

Clerk: Rae Ritchie, Assistant Clerk: James Bradbury
Elder: Lynn Morris
Pastoral Friend: Judith Parkin

2024.082 Worship and memorial minutes

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard parts of the memorial minutes for our Friends Joy Evans, of Warwick Local Meeting, and Ruth Sutton of Cotteridge Local Meeting who died on 24th July 2024 aged 75. Both memorial minutes are printed in the Area Meeting papers.

2024.083 Representatives

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

The clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today: Rosemary Whiting, Hayden Allport, John Harding, Jon Longstaff, Teala Dearden, Angelina Birch and Edith Yaxley.

2024.084 JYM Reports

We heard from one of the young CEQ Friends, Edith, about their experience at this year's Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM), held from 26th-30th July at Friends House. Their written reports are included in the Area Meeting papers.

We thank our Friends for their insightful and inspiring reflections. We also note that Edith is on the arrangements committee for JYM 2025, to be held in May, and ask Friends to hold her in the light during this process.

2024.085 Reflections on the Morning's Workshop

This morning, 25 Central England Quakers took part in an all-age workshop led by Mel Cook, Quaker Life Development Worker for Children, Families and Young Adults. We were joined by two Friends from Worcestershire and Shropshire Area Meeting.

The workshop was titled "Building Community: we are stronger when we know each other". We certainly did get to know each other more during this session, with lots of laughter, storytelling and creativity. It was lovely to have young friends joining in and interacting with other friends of all ages. As Mel, the facilitator, said, often people feel that they don't have the experience or skills to engage with children in meetings but it's not rocket science. We just need to be ourselves.

Mel also highlighted a new BYM resource called The Welcome Box for Local Meetings to create and welcome children, young people and families visiting meeting for the first time. Leaflets are available and the resource will be available online soon too.

2024.086 Response to the Riots

Since we last met in July, a series of riots driven by racism, anti-migrant rhetoric and disinformation has taken place across the country. The CEQAM clerks felt called to share Quaker resources available to those wishing to respond or reflect on these events.

The Toolkit for Action "engaging with conflict and challenging hate" produced by Quaker Peace and Social Witness has many ideas for reflecting on and responding to hatred and violence, and a link to download it is printed in the AM papers.

Quakers in Britain are launching a new Quaker Peacebuilding Network for Quakers, and Friends are invited to join the network.

At the September meeting of the BYM Racial Justice Network, the focus was on the recent riots in England and Northern Ireland and Alister Fuller (Quaker Life) invited Friends in the Network to consider a number of questions. CEQ's Responding to Racism Recognised Group suggests that CEQ Friends explore these questions as individuals, in small groups or within Local Meetings.

- How did this "land" with you, and in you?
- How did you respond, in your heart, in your life, individually, as communities?
- What might we do to help shape what happens next? What do we feel needs to change? What is our work in that?
- What can we be hopeful about?

We have heard that Selly Oak Meeting approached their local Al Mahdi group and took them some flowers, they also made contact with their new MP and supported him in his efforts to develop positive community relations.

It was suggested that the relative lack of incidents in Birmingham was partly due to the amount of good interfaith work done behind the scenes in very many ways. Those Friends with interfaith connections experienced a turbulent time. We were pleased that the interfaith walk organised by Footsteps and hosted by BGR was such a success with some 50 people attending, at a very crucial time.

The Conversation Café held at Warwick Meeting decided to continue with a picnic for café regulars and their families, despite the council cancelling one in the local park.

Coventry Meeting had two room lets (involving support for asylum groups and refuges) cancelled, but both returned after a break.

2024.087 The Future of Peace Hub: a 10 year review

On behalf of the Peace Hub Management Committee, the CEQ Peace Hub Coordinator, Pete Doubtfire, has shared a paper outlining the Committee's plans for the Hub's second decade of working to build an inclusive community active on matters of peace and justice.

The plan is to focus on the Hub's biggest strengths, which lie in three areas:

- Working with and supporting other groups committed to peace and social justice through outreach, inreach and networking
- Organising peace events and activities that build on this partnership work
- Taking people on a journey from passive to active in this peace work

The Committee believes that these priorities are best served by laying down the drop-in model whereby the Hub is open to members of the public at certain times of the week. This change has implications for the future of 41 Bull Street, which currently houses the Hub and the Peacemakers office, although the building could continue to provide office space for the Coordinator once the public-facing element ceases at the end of 2024.

The Peace Hub Management Committee is working with the Coordinator and the CEQ Principal Officer to develop these plans and will bring a proposal to Area Meeting in November for discernment. In the meantime, Friends are asked to consider this paper and share any feedback with Pete Doubtfire, Peace Hub Coordinator.

2024.088 Children and Young People's Committee Report

We have received a very comprehensive report from the Children's and Young People's Committee, which comprises members from three Local Meetings, a member of the CEQ safeguarding team and the Local Development Worker. The Children and Young People's Advocate from Worcestershire and Shropshire Area Meeting has also started coming to the meetings, which has been a positive experience.

Currently five Local Meetings have children and young people associated with them, and their individual activities are described in the report. In addition, there have been a number of exciting events for children and young people across the Area Meeting including a canal boat trip and a trip to Conkers Discovery Centre, with a residential family weekend at Barnes Close near Bromsgrove planned for February 2025.

The Youth Group has continued to meet monthly, attended by around 10 young people from five Local Meetings (see report for details).

Representatives from CEQ attended Senior Conference (for 15 to 18 year olds) and Junior Gathering (for 11 to 14 year olds) and we have enjoyed reading their reports.

The Committee would welcome additional members, ideally some Friends who are not parents of children and young people.

The Committee has spent time this year considering whether a paid Children, Youth and Families worker would be a positive step forward, and we have received a very detailed proposal setting out the background, reasons, benefits and what is happening in other parts of the country. An indicative cost for a full time post is £50,000 per annum.

We have been asked to discern:

- Do we feel led to engage a Children, Youth and Families Development Worker as laid out in this proposal?
- If so, for how long would we want the initial post to be in place for, bearing in mind that relationship building of the kind needed takes time? When can the Area Meeting Treasurer, in consultation with CEQ Trustees and Principal Officer, report back to Area Meeting about the financial implications of creating this role?
- Do we have a different vision for a paid worker?
- How else might we develop as an all-age community? How else can we better support children, young people and families within CEQ and the Local Meetings that welcome them?

A question was asked about the possibility of sharing the resource with another Area Meeting, but the workload involved might make this difficult.

We ask Local Meetings to consider the above questions and share their responses by the end of October. Trustees hope to be able to comment on the financial implications as part of the budget process this autumn, reporting to Area Meeting in November.

We thank CYPC for their report and know that the existing activities are greatly valued by those taking part.

2024.089 Quaker Gardens Project 2024-5

We have received a report from the CEQ Climate Action Group about their Quaker Garden Project 2024-5, included in the Area Meeting papers, and one of the group's convenors, Virginia Wollaston, gave a presentation about the project during Area Meeting.

The Quaker Gardens Project aims to explore the gardens and green spaces attached to Meeting Houses within CEQ across the seasons and considering provision for nature and rewilding as well as the stories behind them. Each Local Meeting will receive a questionnaire to identify plants and features of interest before a photography team visits the site during a specific season. Local Meetings will then be invited to provide text to accompany the images in the final document, which will be issued as a calendar too. The team would welcome feedback on optimum calendar size.

This text will follow a format that allows the project to explore the different roles that gardens and green spaces play in our Quaker meetings, both as a site of memory and identity and in support of our testimony to sustainability.

We thank our Friends who are involved in this project and look forward to seeing the results in due course.

2024.090 How the Truth has Prospered at Stourbridge Local Meeting

We have received a report from Stourbridge Local Meeting about how the Truth has prospered over the last 12 months. The full report, included in the Area Meeting papers, is organised into sections that illustrate the different ways in which meetings can nurture and be nurtured by the Truth: spiritual development, communications and social events; the children's group; faith in the community, faith in action; outreach; sustainability; projects. The report also demonstrates that meetings can build meaningful relationships with local communities and communities elsewhere in the world.

2024.091 Friends Acting Under Concern

There are no new updates regarding Friends acting under concern. We note, however, that a number of Friends from CEQ took part in a Peace Pilgrimage between Malvern and Telford from 9th-14th September 2024.

The SDSC arms fair will be held again at Telford International Centre on 18th, 19th and 20th November 2024. The trial of four Friends from CEQ for action at this event in 2023 is now set for 20th January 2025. Friends are reminded that their support is still needed and they can join the WhatsApp group for updates. Contact Jo Hindley for the link.

2024.092 Sibford School GM Report 2024

We have received a report from Julia Furminger (a former pupil) on her attendance as our representative at Sibford School's General Meeting on 15th June.

Sibford started the 2023/2024 academic year by welcoming a new head teacher, Rebecca Evans, who came with a wealth of experience and is taking a fresh dynamic approach to the school. Her focus has been on six key aims which are set out in the report.

Academically it was a successful year. Sport, Music and Drama play a big part in the school's life with many excellent outcomes.

Julia reports that the future looks exciting however there will be tough decisions to be made. Overall costs are rising and the potential of VAT being added to fees is a concern.

Sibford Old Scholars Association is struggling and the head would like to see this improved.

It was Sibford's Celebration Day on the day of General Meeting, so those attending the GM were invited to join visitors, pupils, parents and staff in the Celebration Day giving them the opportunity to see the less formal side of Sibford life.

We thank Julia for her report

2024.093 Reflections on Yearly Meeting 2024

We have received four reflections on Yearly Meeting 2024 from five CEQ Friends, including two who attended the Young People's programme and one who volunteered with the children's programme. We also have the two reflections on JYM included in minute 2024.084. These reflections, along with the Yearly Meeting Epistle, are included in the Area Meeting papers. We thank these Friends for their thoughtful insights into the experience of attending such a large gathering of Quakers at a time when major changes to Yearly Meeting structures were being discerned.

Yearly Meeting 2025 is taking place between 23rd-26th May 2025 at Friends House, London.

2024.094 Membership

(a) Deaths

We record the death of our Friend Ruth Charlotte Sutton on 24th July 2024, aged 75

(b) Applications

We have received applications for membership from

- Tim Peat Ashworth (KIN)
- Chad Perkins (BGR)
- Tom Dunkley Jones (COT)

We ask our Nominations Committee to find Friends to visit them and to report back to us with the names.

2024.095 Marriage: Certificate of Accomplishment

The clerks have received Form H, the certificate of accomplishment, for the marriage of Fiona Waterhouse and Clive Gordon which took place on Saturday 24th August 2024 at Sutton Coldfield Meeting House.

We send good wishes to Fiona and Clive and our thanks to all involved in supporting the occasion.

2024.096 Nominations

KINGS HEATH LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

To serve as an elder/pastoral Friend for another triennium from January 2025 to December 2027: Liz Collinge-Hill and Annette Gough

COTTERIDGE LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

To serve as Elders for a triennium from January 2025-December 2027: Anne Ullathorne, Esther Boyd, Sue Thompson and Jill Stow. Anne has served as an elder since January 2022, Esther and Sue have served as elders since January 2023.

To serve as pastoral Friends from January 2025-December 2027: Sarah Jones, Cathy Tuckett, Leonora Wilson and Harriet Martin. This will be a second triennium for Sarah, Cathy and Leonora.

To serve as a pastoral Friend from January 2025-December 2025: Patricia Bennett

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

RELEASE FROM SERVICE:

John Cockcroft (SUT) from Outreach and Communications Committee

Diana Biddlestone (WAR) as an elder

Lyndon Thomas (WAR) as a trustee

Nicholas Ronan (STO) from Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee

We thank our Friends for their service.

CORRECTION:

Gillian Waddilove (COV) to serve on Trustees Employment Committee for another triennium from October 2024 to September 2027 not for another year as stated in the record sheet for July Area Meeting.

2024.097 Northfield Meeting House September 2024

CEQAM Trustees and the CEQAM Trustees Property Committee have shared a minute regarding the tenancy at Northfield Meeting House. This comes in response to our Friend Janet Blann selling the Quaker preschool that currently occupies the building and a request from the potential new owners to have longer opening hours, including in school holidays, and exclusive use of the property. The minute reads:

T24.08.06-05 Northfield Meeting House

Property Committee held an additional meeting on 1st August to consider a request from a nursery provider who are considering buying the Quaker Pre-school business at Northfield, specifically, they would want to have longer opening hours, all year round. Property Committee recommend to trustees that they should enter into negotiations with Kayleigh and Ellie Driscoll who wish to open a day nursery called Precious Times at Northfield Meeting House, with a full repairing lease, with the nursery opening for longer hours throughout the year, which is an extension from the hours and term time use only of the current licence.

Trustees recommend this request and send this minute to Area Meeting Clerks for consideration at September Area Meeting.

We agree with this request and ask CEQAM Trustees to enter into such negotiations.

2024.098 Trustees Annual Report and Accounts for 2023

The Annual Report & Accounts for 2023 were approved by Trustees on 6th August 2024, and have been signed and submitted to the Charity Commission. The document has been circulated to Local Meeting Clerks with the papers for this Area Meeting. Additional paper copies have been tabled at this Area Meeting, and further copies are available on request from the CEQ Office. The document is also published on the CEQ website.

We encourage all Friends to read the document and there will be an opportunity for Friends to ask questions at Area Meeting in November. It will be helpful if any questions about the accounts can be submitted in advance to the Area Meeting Treasurer, Anne Ullathorne (anne.ullathorne@blueyonder.co.uk or 0121 476 0118), to allow time for the appropriate information to be obtained.

2024.099 Request to Host Area Meeting in 2025

The Area Meeting clerks have decided not to hold a devotional Area Meeting in December 2024. For 2025, they have also decided to move the devotional Area Meeting usually held in February to May to support the preparation of hearts and minds for Yearly Meeting.

Local Meetings are asked to consider which Area Meeting on the suggested programme for 2025 that they could host and, for the weekday meetings, which day of the week they would prefer. The Area Meeting clerks would like to encourage Local Meetings to consider partnering with other nearby Local Meetings to host jointly.

Please send all offers to Helen in the office by 28th October 2024.

Month	Day	Date	Time	LM host	Agenda items deadline
January	Saturday	25 th	1400-1700 preceded by activities fayre over lunch	BUL	8th
February	Tuesday	18th	1800-2100		5th
March	Saturday	22nd	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business		5th
April	Wednesday OR Thursday	23 rd 24th	1800-2100		9th
May	Friday	16th	1800-1900 devotional	SEL tbc	N/A
June	Saturday	28th	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business	WAR	11th
July	Wednesday OR Thursday	23 rd 24th	1800-2100		9th
August	Saturday	16th	1400-1500 devotional	SUT tbc	N/A
September	Saturday	27 th	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business		10 th
October	Wednesday OR Thursday	22nd 23rd	1800-2100		8 th
November	Saturday	22nd	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business	BUL	5th

2024.100 George Fox 400

Within Central England Quakers there have been several events to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Fox. There is one more event planned:

Outreach Event at Barnt Green Meeting House on Sunday 29th September

Barnt Green and Redditch Friends will be showing a short film about the life of George Fox after a shared picnic lunch. After the film, there will be discussion and questions with light refreshments.

Woodbrooke courses related to George Fox 400 are listed here: <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/fox-at-400/>

There is a course entitled 'The Start of the Quaker Way: Fox 400' running from 4th to 24th October with live zoom sessions on Thursday evenings and 'George Fox: An Ecological Quaker Perspective on Saturday 5th October 4-5.30pm.

A full list of events outside of Central England Area Meeting is available here: <https://fwcc.world/event/fox/>

2024.101 Thanks and next meeting

We thank all Stourbridge Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality throughout the day. We again thank Mel Cook for facilitating such a joyful workshop this morning.

We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Tuesday 22nd October at Bournville Meeting House, with tea from 5pm then Area Meeting from 6pm until 9pm. The deadline for agenda items to be with the office is Tuesday 8th October.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting
Rae Ritchie, clerk this time