

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bournville Meeting House and online on 22nd October 2024

Clerk: James Bradbury, Assistant Clerk: Paula Button

Elder: Kate White

Pastoral Friend: Howard Saunders

2024.102 Worship and memorial minutes

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard parts of the memorial minutes for our Friends Gillian Bryan of Bournville Local Meeting, and William Whiting of Stourbridge Local Meeting. Both memorial minutes are printed in the Area Meeting papers.

2024.103 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:

Lorna Foster, Francesca Rogers, Lisa Small, Fran Wilde

2024.104 Testimony

The memorial minute for Sara Packer (our minute 2024.001 refers) that we sent to Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group has been expanded and is suggested as a Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Sara Packer. This has been read to us and we accept this as a testimony and forward it to Britain Yearly Meeting.

2024.105 Peacemakers Report

We were pleased to welcome Sara Hagel, Director of Peacemakers, by video link, to present her report. Extracts from the 2023 annual report were published in the Area Meeting papers, and the full annual report for 2023 is available at: <https://peacemakers.org.uk/about/annual-report/>

Sara described a new three-year project *Planting the seeds of peace* aimed at 7 to 11-year olds which was launched at the start of 2023, offering a range of programmes, some existing and some new, which Peacemakers hope will “flower and fruit in wonderful ways”. As part of this project the team have created a 2-minute animation video to explain what peace education is in schools, which we have enjoyed watching. It may be viewed via the following link:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSIF7XCndSo>

Other points highlighted by Sara were:-

- Peacemakers is working on a communication strategy, working with a consultant, exploring different ways of reaching audiences, and working nationally
- Peacemakers is the only peace education charity in England reaching out to all aspects of peace education
- Peacemakers is continuing its work in West Midlands schools, with peer mediation training
- Peacemakers is working with Peace Hub on the Peace Ambassadors programme
- Sara is a representative on the advisory board of the all-party parliamentary group on Restorative Justice
- Peacemakers is piloting a peaceful leadership course for year 12 (17-year olds), which is voluntary, after school, and there were 15 students on the last two courses.
- The challenge from some of the trainers to work towards being an anti-racist organisation, and to consider racial injustice within Peacemakers' programmes

Sara noted some challenges faced by Peacemakers such as difficulties in contacting and liaising with schools, also fundraising challenges, with some previously reliable funders not responding to new approaches.

2024.106 How the Truth has Prospered at Bournville Local Meeting

We have received a report from Bournville Meeting informing us of “How the Truth has Prospered” over the last year. The full report is in the papers.

Meetings are held weekly which include a few new attenders. “Alongside” online meetings are held on fifth Sundays, at the same time as in person, rather than together. This is also when other Local Meetings are sometimes visited. A marriage was happily celebrated in September.

Special events include a Christmas Day Meeting for Worship which is always much appreciated, being part of the Bournville Christmas Festival, holding an enjoyable Quiz Night, a day outing at Harvington Hall, an Awayday at Stourbridge Meeting House, opening the Meeting House for Bournville Heritage Open Days, where over 1,000 people visited the Meeting House, and attending the Fox 400 Pilgrimage and concert.

For Spiritual Learning Friends hold a shared lunch once a month and talk about their journeys. There have also been two journey groups meeting regularly. The Meeting has now begun an exploration of Chapter Two of Quaker Faith and Practice - ‘Worship and Prayer’ - over six sessions with worship sharing and discussion.

Bournville is clearly very active, friendly and community-minded, and we thank Bournville Friends for their report.

2024.107 CEQ Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group report for the triennium 2022 – 2024

We have received a report from the Elders & Pastoral Friends Support Group, prepared by Cathy Khurana, Clerk, and Cathy has spoken to her report.

We have been reminded of the duties and tasks of the Support Group, which meets five or six times a year. It is a relatively small committee of eight Friends, which means that not all Local Meetings are represented. Cathy noted the difficulty in getting Friends to agree on the dates and times of meetings. In January 2025 Nominations Committee will be looking for new names to serve on the group.

A standing item on their agenda is ‘Sharing news of our Local Meetings’, and Cathy reports that over the last couple of years the news has grown steadily more positive as we all emerged from the Covid pandemic and worked hard at rebuilding our Quaker communities.

Several events for all Elders and Pastoral Friends have been held including ‘Telling our Covid Stories’, a session on conflict resolution led by Peacemakers, a morning of Singing as Worship, and an Exchange of Ideas Day.

Various matters seem to come around every few years for further discernment such as the Unattached Friends and the use of technology in our Meetings for Worship. Blended worship is proving to be a divisive issue which remains a lifeline and a joy to some, but an intrusion to others. There may be scope for considering together some of the issues, and exploring common solutions.

Intervisitation is one of the duties of the Support Group and the Group has suggested that 5th Sundays should be Visit-Another-Meeting-Sunday. Have Friends accepted the challenge and visited other Local Meetings? It would be good to hear.

The report concludes with some questions:-

- Should all our Local Meetings be represented on Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group?
- Have Elders/Pastoral Friends attended any of the events?
- Would you/your Meeting be interested in learning/sharing/discussing the Quaker business method, and/or Quaker theology?

We thank Cathy for her report.

2024.108 Birmingham Faiths Climate Action Partnership Report

At Area Meeting in June 2024, Chris Martin (representing Footsteps and Cotteridge Quakers) was asked to prepare a short briefing paper on the new Birmingham Faiths Climate Action Partnership (BiFCAP), and we were pleased to receive his paper today.

BiFCAP was launched in June 2024 following over a year's discussions with Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. It is a partnership between Bahu Trust, Footsteps and the national Ashden Climate Solutions in Action charity (Ashden) to build the capacity of faith groups to lead, and engage in, climate and environmental action.

The paper describes how the Partnership came about, and how it aims to build the capacity of Birmingham faith groups to lead, and engage in, community led climate action in disadvantaged areas of Birmingham. It will receive £200,000 funding over three years from Esmée Fairbairn. The Peace Hub has a key role to play in developing with Ashden a virtual Hub that will share the learning from the partnership across the UK. Together BiFCAP will, it is hoped, be developing a more diverse and inclusive Birmingham climate movement.

BiFCAP is shortly opening a call for proposals from faith-based community groups and organisations to encourage them to deliver exciting climate and eco action projects which will have lasting impact and outcomes which can inspire others. The scope of these projects is described in the paper.

More details about developing local eco action project proposals will be on the Footsteps website and there will be a community launch event at Hodge Hill Church on Saturday 9th November.

We thank Chris Martin for his paper.

2024.109 George Fox 400

There are no further events planned in Central England to mark George Fox 400. Woodbrooke courses related to George Fox 400 are listed here: <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/fox-at-400/>

A local event organised by Staffordshire Quakers, involving a member of CEQ, is "*Woe unto the bloody city of Lichfield*", a historical re-enactment of George Fox, on Sunday 27th October 2024 at 2.30pm in Lichfield Market Square

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

These include:-

- George Fox: the first Quaker Socialist? 4th November 19.30 online
- The Religious Roots of the Historic Peace Churches, 5th November 19.30 online
- George Fox: Global Quaker perspectives, 9th November 16.00-17.30 online
- George Fox: an African-American Indigenous Quaker perspective, 23rd November 16.00-17.30 online

We have received a card from Tim Gee, General Secretary, Friends World Committee for Consultation World Office. It says:

Dear Central England Friends,

Thank you for supporting the World Family of Friends, through your prayers, contributions and actions. It feels like the George Fox 400 year of activity has been a great success, as was the World Plenary Meeting. All of the documents are on the FWCC website, but the outcomes will unfold in the years ahead.

In Friendship, Tim Gee

<https://fwcc.world/>

2024.110 Friends Acting Under Concern and Peace Pilgrimage

The trial of four Friends from Central England Area Meeting for action at the Telford Arms Fair has been reset for 20th January 2025. Friends are reminded that their support is still needed and that they can join the WhatsApp group for updates - contact Jo Hindley for the link. The SDSC arms fair will be held at Telford International Centre on 18th, 19th and 20th November 2024. The 20th is the "day of activity".

Peace Pilgrimage 2024

We were very pleased to receive a personal report of the Peace Pilgrimage from Lorna Foster, which is included in full in the papers. This describes her initial hopes of finding a like-minded community in Quakers, then moves through the stages of first hearing about and then learning more about the arms trade, the Arms

Fair and the passionate Quaker opposition to it. She began to feel some alarm herself about the issues and great compassion for the Friends and their non-violent protest.

Then she heard about the Peace Pilgrimage and immediately felt drawn to it, though very apprehensive about the demands it would bring. But she just kept taking the next step and joined the Pilgrimage starting in Malvern on 9th September 2024. She vividly describes the experience and all that she learnt during it. Her realisation was that it is about letting go of ego, and finding joy in living in harmony and peace with one another.

Lorna has added some comments this evening – she sees a strong link between spirituality and action, which is not political but is all about protecting our world and starts with love, aiming to bring people together

We thank Lorna for her report and her enthusiastic description of the personal journey which happened as a result of the Pilgrimage.

2024.111 Sale of 51 and 53 Church Road properties

Area Meeting was informed in November 2023 of the Trustees decision to sell the Church Road investment properties (51 & 53 Church Road, Northfield, two parts of a single building, leased to Oulsnam and ecobirmingham respectively), which were becoming a drain on resources for the charity (minute 2023.098).

The properties were marketed via KWB property agents and, following receipt of a RICS report which advised this was a suitable valuation, an offer of £300,000 was accepted by Trustees in May 2024. On Friday 11th October 2024 the sale was completed, with new owners MIA Property Group. Northfield Meeting House has retained footpath access to Church Rd from its car park, via a small passage way along the side boundary of number 53. With regard to ecobirmingham, the new owners are picking up the leases and the tenants are remaining in situ for now.

The funds have initially been transferred to the Trustees CAF account with the intention of purchasing further CCLA investments or using the resources as otherwise discerned by Area Meeting or Trustees.

2024.112 Report on Meeting for Sufferings

We have received a report from Nicholas Paton Philip (STO) who attended his first Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) as the CEQ named alternate, online, on 5th October 2024.

Nicholas has spoken to his report, and has drawn our attention to an item regarding Middle Eastern policy decisions which he was unable to publish in the report. He read the following Minute which MfS has now released.

MfS/24/10/09 Our work in Palestine and Israel

Further to minute MfS/24/06/09, we receive paper MfS 2024 10 11 which provides a report on discernment from Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee (QPSWCC) on the use of the terms genocide and apartheid in relation to the current conflict in Palestine and Israel.

Our twin roles as prophets and reconcilers may be difficult to balance. We reaffirm that ultimately our task is to engage in peace building focused on ending the illegal occupation and seeking justice for all who live there and the surrounding region, however we note that in this situation our primary role is to bear witness. “The first skill [in addressing conflict] is naming: being clear and honest about the problem as I see it” (Quaker faith & practice 20.71). We note the recommendation that we should align with the International Court of Justice rulings that the term apartheid is an accurate description of the situation in occupied Palestine and that there is a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza. We accept this advice as honouring our commitment to speak truth in love. As George Fox said, “My allegiance lies in truth and faithfulness” (Quaker faith & practice 19.37)

We also note the increasing tensions in our own society, where some faith communities face significant hostility, and that we have significant work to do in supporting interfaith relationships here. “Let all things be done for building up”, (1 Corinthians 14:26). We recognise that additional work may require the commitment of additional resources.

We have heard that at the World Plenary meeting the word genocide was used without controversy.

A key item highlighted by Nicholas was extensive discernment concerning the minute from Quaker Life Central Committee (QLCC) on new ways of belonging. Concerns were raised over whether the new structures would appear diluted compared with the existing Area Meeting (AM) structure, and whether there would be sufficient oversight and support from Britain Yearly Meeting in the process. It was agreed that there would be no quick decision and any proposal would go back to BYM for final discernment. There has

been a wish from young people to have a non-geographical type of membership and one Friend welcomed the considerations to broaden potential for membership for those whose working patterns mean that they are not available to attend Sunday Meeting for Worship. The matter will return at a future MfS after the group has considered further amendments.

The paper from the Group to Review Central Structures (GRCS) has been widely circulated within CEQ by the CEQ Office so that individuals could respond and raise any concerns by the very tight deadline of 13th October. We have heard this evening of some particular concerns.

Finally, a report from the Reparations Working Group (RWG), completing the first year of a 3-5 year remit from BYM trustees, was shared. The plan is for the group to visit Area Meetings within Britain to see how they're progressing on this journey.

We thank Nicholas for his report.

2024.113 Membership

(a) Applications

We have received applications for membership from:-

- Fiona Campbell (COT)
- Marion Doyen (WAR)

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

(b) Transfer In:

We have received a request from Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting for the transfer of Karima and Steve Brooke (COV) to our Area Meeting. We accept this request and ask our Clerk to issue a certificate of acceptance and to welcome our Friends into membership of our Area Meeting.

(c) Transfer Out Request:

Ruth Gaston (WAR) has requested that her membership be transferred to Leicester Area Meeting.

2024.114 Marriage: Certificate of Accomplishment

The clerks have received Form H, the certificate of accomplishment, for the civil partnership to marriage conversion of Christine Terry and Helen Salter which took place on Saturday 28th September 2024 at Bournville Meeting House.

We send good wishes to Christine and Helen and our thanks to all involved in supporting the occasion.

2024.115 Nominations

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE SUGGESTS:

Peter Ullathorne (COT) to serve as an Area Meeting trustee for a further triennium from January 2025 to December 2027

Steve Pullan (COV) to serve as an Area Meeting trustee for a further triennium from January 2025 to December 2027

James Bradbury (STO) to serve as Area Meeting co-clerk from January 2025 to July 2025

Paula Button (WAR) to serve as Area Meeting co-clerk from January 2025 to July 2026

Rae Ritchie (HAR) to serve as Area Meeting co-clerk from January 2025 to July 2027

Sarah Evans (COT) to serve as Registering Officer for a further year from December 2024 to November 2025

Jo Blakey (SEL) to serve on the Children and Young People's Committee from October 2024 until September 2027

Claire Bowman (BOU) to serve as Nominations Committee co-clerk for a second triennium from January 2025 to December 2027

Peter Ullathorne (COT) to serve as our nominated trustee on Westhill Endowment Trust for a triennium from October 2024 to September 2027

Rhiannon Grant (BOU) and John Lampen (STO) to visit Tim Peat-Ashworth on his journey into membership
Anne Ullathorne (COT) and Donald Stubbings (BOU) to visit Tom Dunkley-Jones on his journey into membership

John West (BGR) and Eleanor Nesbitt (COV) to visit Chad Perkins on his journey into membership

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

We are pleased to note that Claire Bowman (BOU) has been invited to serve as a Quaker representative on the Birmingham Council of Faiths Management Committee

BOURNVILLE LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

Robin Bowman to serve as an elder from July 2024 to June 2027

Donald Stubbings to serve as an elder for a further two years from January 2025 to December 2026

Vic Grainger to serve as an elder for a further year from January to December 2025

Anne Giles to serve as a pastoral Friend for a further two years from January 2025 to December 2026

Howard Saunders to serve as a pastoral Friend for a further year from January to December 2025

HALL GREEN LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

Joy Aldworth, Mina Tilt, Judith Millington, Geoffrey Braithwaite to serve as elders for the triennium from January 2025 to December 2027.

Celia Morris, Trevor Barker, Huw Davies, Doreen Clarkson and Robert Morris to serve as pastoral Friends for the triennium from January 2025 to December 2027.

WARWICK LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

Sarah Thompson and Annie Pettifer to serve as elders for the triennium from January 2025 to December 2027.

Paula Button and Ann James to serve as pastoral Friends for the triennium January 2025 to December 2027.

Rob Hooper and Frances Rutter to serve on Area Meeting Nominations Committee for the triennium from January 2025 to December 2027.

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

We are aware that some Local Meetings have asked attenders to undertake pastoral care roles, and their contribution is greatly valued, but at the moment only members are appointed to the role by Area Meeting.

RELEASE FROM SERVICE:

Rae Ritchie (HAR) as an elder and pastoral Friend

We thank our Friend for her service.

2024.116 Request to Host Area Meeting in 2025

Local Meetings are asked to consider which Area Meeting on the suggested programme for 2025 (not yet assigned) 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.

Sandra Berry (acting Clerk to Trustees) has drawn our attention to a workshop about Line Management in the morning of the January 2025 Area Meeting (10am to 12pm).

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	18 th	1800-2100		5th
March	Saturday	22 nd	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business	COT	5th
April	Wednesday OR Thursday	26 th	1800-2100		9th
May	Friday	16 th	1800-1900 devotional	SEL	N/A
June	Saturday	28 th	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business	WAR	11th
July	Wednesday OR Thursday	23 rd 24 th	1800-2100		9th
August	Saturday	16 th	1400-1500 devotional	SUT	N/A
September	Saturday	27 th	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business	COV	10th
October	Thursday	23 rd	1800-2100	BOU	8th
November	Saturday	22 nd	1045-1245 workshop 1400-1700 business	BUL	5th

2024.117 Thanks and next meetings

We thank Bournville Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality.

We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Saturday 23rd November 2024, 2pm Bull Street Meeting House, preceded by a workshop from 10.45-12.45 exploring membership. Deadline for agenda items to be with the office: Tuesday 5th November

The next area meeting after November 2024 will be held on Saturday 25th January 2025, 2pm Bull Street Meeting House preceded by an Activities Fayre over lunch. If your committee, group or branch would like to have a table at this Fayre, please let the office know.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting
James Bradbury, clerk this time

Correction to Notice: on page 17 of the booklet the BCF Faith & Reflection evening is on Monday 18th November