

# **Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bull Street Meeting House and online on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

Clerk: James Bradbury Assistant Clerk: Rae Ritchie  
Elder: Barbara Forbes  
Pastoral Friend: Wendy Burnett

## **2025.001 Worship**

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard 23.10 of Quaker Faith & Practice:-

*We need both a deeper spirituality and a more outspoken witness. If our spirituality can reach the depths of authentic prayer, our lives will become an authentic witness for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, a witness which becomes the context for our prayer. Out of the depths of authentic prayer comes a longing for peace and a passion for justice. And our response to violence and injustice is to pray more deeply, because only God can show us the way out of the mess that the world is in. And only God gives us the strength to follow that Way.*

*Gordon Matthews, 1989*

## **2025.002 Representatives**

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

The clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today: Jonathan Bowmer (WAR), Pete Doubtfire (BUL), Lorna Foster (SOL), Chad Perkins (BGR), Ethan Sales (WAR), Becky Shirley (SUT), David Ward (BOU), Fran Wilde (SEL), Sue Wilding (STO),

## **2025.003 Testimony**

The memorial Minute for Joy Evans (our Minute 2024.082 refers) that we sent to Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group is suggested as a Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Joy Evans. This has been read to us and we accept this as a testimony and forward it to Britain Yearly Meeting.

## **2025.004 How the Truth has Prospered at Bull Street Local Meeting**

Attendance at Bull Street Meeting on a Sunday is usually about 18 to 20 people with many elderly but also a number of younger friends and attenders which greatly enriches their worshipping, and a midweek meeting is also held on a Wednesday.

Advices and Queries are read regularly throughout the year to guide and inspire friends. There are sessions where passages are read from Quaker Faith and Practice which they enjoy discussing and sharing together. Business meetings are held regularly and they donate to a range of Quaker and other charities.

They have occasional social activities such as visiting the Victorian Radical Exhibition at Birmingham Museum.

They host Area Meeting twice during the year and look forward to these occasions.

We thank Bull Street Meeting for their report.

## **2025.005 Reflections on the Activities Fayre**

From 12pm to 2pm today Friends were invited to visit and engage with 18 CEQ Branches, Committees and Groups, each one having an individual table display. A booklet has been published with a one-page summary prepared by each of the Groups on their activities and aims. The event was well attended, with many useful conversations, and we hope that visiting Friends will be able to share their experience and the booklet with their Local Meetings. We also hope that it will encourage Friends to offer service to the Committees and Groups in support of their important work and witness. A suggestion has been made that some of the information included in the booklet, and details of other projects that Local Meetings are involved in, are made available on the CEQ website so that it is more widely accessible and that similar activities are offered in the future.

## **2025.006 Update from Coventry Meeting on their Building Project**

Gyll Brown of Coventry Meeting spoke to us, and answered questions, about progress with Coventry Meeting's fundraising for their building to make the building safer, and more easily accessible, to the 1000 or so footfall each month, many of whom come from vulnerable groups. This includes a modest extension for a lift and new toilets. They would very much appreciate information on sources of funding to help them in order to bring the building up to modern standards. Currently they have raised £315,000 and are working hard to reach the 50% threshold of around £400,000 so they can then apply to some larger funders. The current totals include a contribution from the CEQ Building Fund and we hope that Trustees will review the Area Meeting level of contribution to the project in light of increased costs. We thank Coventry Meeting for their update.

## **2025.007 Membership Matters**

### **a) Applications**

We have received an application for membership from Lorna Foster (SOL). We ask our Nominations Committee to find Friends to visit her and to report back to us with the names.

We have received a request from Anthony Yelloly (recently moved from HAR to BUL) to reinstate his membership. We refer this application to Nominations Committee.

### **b) Journeys into Membership**

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Tom Dunkley-Jones (COT) from Anne Ullathorne (COT) and Donald Stubbings (BOU) and this has been read to us.

We have also received a report on the journey into membership of Chad Perkins (BGR) from John West (BGR) and Eleanor Nesbitt (COV) and this has been read to us.

We have also received a report on the journey into membership of Tim Peat Ashworth (KIN) from John Lampen (STO) and Rhiannon Grant (BOU) and this has been read to us.

We welcome Tom, Chad and Tim into membership of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). We ask their visitors to welcome them, and the clerk to write to them.

### **c) Internal Transfer:**

We note the following internal transfer: Bryony Yelloly from HAR to BUL

## **2025.008 Nominations**

### **a) Nominations Committee suggests:**

- Fran Wilde (SEL) to serve on Outreach and Communications Committee for another triennium from January 2025 to December 2027
- Karima Brooke (COV) to serve as an Area Meeting trustee for a triennium from January 2025 to December 2027

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

### **b) Clerk to Trustees**

- Sandra Berry to serve as Clerk to Trustees from January 2025 until March 2027

This name being acceptable we appoint our Friend accordingly.

### c) Junior Yearly Meeting

- To attend Junior Yearly Meeting, 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2025, Rose (COT) and Natasha (WAR)

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly

### d) Local Meeting appointments of Elders, Pastoral Friends and to Nominations Committee

- **Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting** suggests John Cox-Woolven, Christine Johnson and John West to serve as Elders and Michael Bickerton, Mike Farnell and Marj Prior to serve as Pastoral Friends for a triennium from January 2025 to December 2027
- **Bull Street Local Meeting** suggests John Kimberley and Barbara Forbes to serve on Area Meeting nominations committee for a triennium from January 2025 to December 2027.
- **Hall Green Local Meeting** suggest Celia Morris and Judith Millington to serve on Area Meeting nominations committee for a triennium from January 2025 to December 2027.
- **Warwick Local Meeting** suggests Jane Cunningham and Marion Doyen to serve as Pastoral Friends for a triennium from January 2025 to December 2027

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

### e) Release from Service

- Christine Bagnall (COT) as a Trustee
- Gill Smith to be released as Clerk to Trustees, and as a Trustee
- Jo Hallett, from Clerks Advisory Committee

We thank our Friends for their service.

## 2025.009 Friends Acting Under Concern

Pete Doubtfire spoke about the trial of four Friends from Central England Area Meeting: Rajan Naidu (SEL), Louise Scrivens (SOL), Ralph Wallin (BOU) and Fran Wilde (SEL). They, as part of a group, took action at the SDSC Arms Fair in Telford in 2023. The trial was at Walsall Magistrates Court on 20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025. They are being tried under the new Public Order Act 2023 legislation and proceedings have now been adjourned until 3<sup>rd</sup> March as the District Judge needs to be clear as to whether they caused serious disruption.

On all three days, our Friends were supported, both inside the court and outside the building, by around 60 people, including other Central England Friends. Those on trial expressed gratitude for this support and for the sense of being held in the light. They are particularly thankful to Jo Hindley for her amazing efforts to organise this support. Similar support will be welcomed in March at Wolverhampton Magistrates Court; please contact Jo Hindley for information.

## 2025.010 Meeting for Sufferings Report

We have received a very detailed and informative report from Nicholas Paton Philip on the Meeting for Sufferings meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2024, which he attended as the CEQ named alternate, online.

His report covered:-

- Update on prison and court register
- Report from Advisory Group on Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRB)
- Highlights of the work being done on the Revision of the Book of Discipline, including an informative slide show – noting that the committee aims to bring the complete and final text to a session of Yearly Meeting in 2030, for adoption.
- A report from BYM Trustees setting out the budget for 2025. Paul Whitehouse, YM Treasurer confirmed that 2025 will be the last year Trustees feel they can afford to operate on a deficit budget, which will mean reducing costs unless contributions from individual Friends are increased.
- Appointment of Clerk and Assistant Clerk from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 to May 2026
- Reports from Quaker World Relations Committee and Quaker Council for European Affairs, reminding us that we are part of an international community of Friends

Nicholas included in his report the full Minute of MfS/24/12/14 “*Appointment of attenders for Quaker service*”, which followed a lengthy and far reaching discussion and discernment. The text includes the statements “we

*recommend to Yearly Meeting that amendments to our discipline should be made to permit Friends not in formal membership to be appointed to area and local meeting roles, and “we recognise that this is the latest step in an ongoing process of discernment and that there is further work to be done on the spiritual meaning of membership”.*

Nicholas' report concluded with an addendum reflecting on Advices and Queries, with a request for individual Friends and meetings to consider this. We ask the Area Meeting Clerks to bring an opportunity for discernment to a future Area Meeting, seeking contributions and discernment from Local Meetings first.

The report also included a letter from the Group to review Central Structures, thanking Friends for their contribution to the consultation. The consultation showed that there is a desire for change and simplification, but there was no consensus over how this might be achieved, and the Group has concluded that it would not be appropriate to move forward with the proposals at this time.

We thank Nicholas for his report.

## **2025.011 Peace Hub Management Committee, revised Terms of Reference**

We thank the Peace Hub Management Committee for their revised Terms of References which are full and detailed. They cover the areas of

1. Governance
2. The Role of the Committee
3. Management Structure
4. Composition of the Committee
5. Meetings
6. Duties and Supplementary Information.

The main responsibilities of the committee will be to appoint, line- manage and support the Peace Hub Coordinator in the furtherance of the strategic aims agreed in September 2024, as set out in the coordinators job description; –

- Encouraging Quakers and wider public in the region to work on peace issues, specifically around the agreed priorities.
- Developing links and working with Quaker, other faith and local community groups through whom to promote and act on the agreed priorities.
- Maintaining links with Peacemakers, and exploring opportunities for working with children and schools linked to the agreed priorities.
- Organising in person and online peace events and activities that fit identified priorities for action
- Developing an activist journey that supports people who have not taken action before to taking action for peace.
- Establishing and working with a focus group to prioritise issues, partners and types of action that will inform these plans

Note that any future use of the building and shop - whether for Quaker purposes or by third parties - is under review and the Management Committee will need to work with other stakeholders as proposals emerge and evolve.

## **2025.012 Sale of Redditch Meeting House**

The sale of Redditch Meeting house was completed on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024 for the sum of £190,000. The property is now in the ownership of Stephen Patrick Lake, Rajesh Singh Dhillon and Richard David Elson as Trustees of The Mainstream Windows Retirement Benefit Scheme. The proceeds of the sale are being held in a high interest/instant access central bank account awaiting further discernment of how the money will be used.

## 2025.013 Reflections on the Outreach Workshop, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2024

We have received a report from Outreach & Communications Committee on the Outreach workshop held at Bull Street on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2024, which was attended by 26 Friends, representing all but two of our Local Meetings and including one Friend from Lichfield Meeting in Staffordshire Area.

The workshop began by considering that the quality of the life, spirit and community of our Local Meeting is a good starting point for attracting people to Quakers. Personal approaches are more effective than the written word, and some 86% of those who attend a Meeting for the first time do so because of having personal contact with a Quaker. Time was spent thinking about how our Local Meetings welcome newcomers and how to encourage them to feel part of Friends in the longer term. New attenders may not be able to serve in certain roles, but may be interested in other areas such as spiritual enquiry, community building, online presence, social activity and social activism. Much of what each Meeting does for its own community life comes from the enthusiasm, interests and skills of individuals which provides outreach that Meetings can build on.

Central support for local outreach was reviewed and discussed.

- We are fortunate that CEQ Business Support Administrator, Helen Waters, and Website Manager, Pete Doubtfire, are able to help with leaflet design, outreach resources and advertising events. Pete's Communications role is being strengthened, as noted in the Peace Hub Terms of Reference.
- We are hoping to develop a regionally based Outreach Programme that Local Meetings can get involved in.
- The committee would like to establish an Outreach Link Friend at each Local Meeting to facilitate communication between the Committee and Meetings and to establish a regional network focused on outreach activity – this might be in the form of a WhatsApp group for sharing outreach ideas, resources and initiatives.
- Members of the committee are happy to run outreach talks or workshops for local meetings.

**We ask all Local Meetings to appoint an Outreach Link Friend and to pass the name to the CEQ Office.**

## 2025.014 Discovering Quakers

Discovering Quakers is a new national outreach charity (Charitable Incorporated Organisation, CIO) which reaches out to enquirers, through social media and other channels, and signposts them to their nearest Meeting. For information about their digital outreach and to sign your Meeting up to be connected with enquirers see: <https://meetings.discoveringquakers.org.uk/enquirers-service/>

They run a zoom session from 1-2pm on the second Thursday of every month where you can find out more and ask questions.

The resources (which can be downloaded) include an excellent introductory leaflet for enquirers.

CEQ receives a national report from Discovering Quakers every couple of months indicating which Meetings across the country are signed up and how many enquiries have been processed in the last 60 days. The results for CEQ Local Meetings are printed in the AM papers, and show that 8 out of the 14 CEQ Meetings are now signed up, with 13 enquiries received in the last 60 days.

Discovering Quakers was originally funded by BYM, but this funding has now run out, and they are appealing for each Meeting to make a voluntary donation appropriate to its circumstances – with a suggested contribution of between £10 to £50 per month. **We ask Local Meetings to consider this when preparing budgets for 2025.**

## 2025.015 Request for information on housing and homelessness

The Area Meeting Clerks are planning a workshop in November about housing and homelessness with Quaker Housing Trust. To help with preparation, they are interested to hear if any Local Meetings or individual Friends are involved in this area in any way. If so, please email the Area Meeting Clerks [AMclerks@ceaqm.org.uk](mailto:AMclerks@ceaqm.org.uk).

## **2025.016 Yearly Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> May 2025 Friends House**

Yearly Meeting 2025 will be held from Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> to Monday 26<sup>th</sup> May at Friends House, Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ. There will be a children's programme at Friends House and residential programmes for 11 to 15s and JYM for 16 to 18s. Bookings are open now <https://www.quaker.org.uk/ym/bookings>.

Bookings for the young people's program close on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, bookings for the children's program close on 4<sup>th</sup> April. Bookings for the online fringe week and Yearly Meeting preparation sessions close on 7<sup>th</sup> April and bookings for Yearly Meeting close on 27<sup>th</sup> April. The focus for Yearly Meeting is our peace testimony. Bursary help is available for Friends wishing to attend.

If anyone would be interested in sharing accommodation in London please contact Rae Ritchie [raeritchie1982@gmail.com](mailto:raeritchie1982@gmail.com).

## **2025.017 Thanks and next meeting**

We thank Bull Street Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality.

We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2025 at 2pm at Barnt Green Meeting House, with lunch from 1pm.

The deadline for agenda items to be with the office is Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

James Bradbury, clerk this time