

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Kings Heath Meeting House and online on 24th April 2025

Clerk: James Bradbury, Assistant Clerk: Paula Button

Elder: Mina Tilt

Pastoral Friend: Huw Davies

2025.045: Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard a reading from *Quaker Faith and Practice*, "Our Peace Testimony, The Personal Roots of Conflict and Education for Peace" 24.54

Conflict is a part of life, a necessary result of the varying needs, aims and perspectives of individuals and communities. It is part of our daily experience, both directly and through television and other news media. The ethos of the home, school or workplace will provide some rules (spoken and unspoken) for handling conflict situations. However, these often contradict each other and the pressures from friends and peer groups can work against the 'official' ways of handling conflict. Society educates young people at best haphazardly and at worst quite destructively as far as conflict is concerned. From an early age, people are led to think that conflicts should be settled by someone in authority: the parent, the teacher, the headteacher, the gangleader, the policeman, the judge, the boss, the president. If there is nobody to arbitrate, then the 'strongest' will 'win' and the 'weaker' will 'lose'. Traditionally, little encouragement has been given to young people to take responsibility for resolving conflicts, to look for 'win-win' solutions. Yet the way in which young people learn to respond to conflict will have a pervasive effect both on the quality of their personal lives and on the prospects for society as a whole. Affirming the personal value of each individual, encouraging mutual respect and consciously developing the skills and attitudes involved in creative conflict resolution must be regarded as an important educational priority.

Sue Bowers and Tom Leimdorfer, 1990

2025.046: Representatives

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

The Clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today: Ethan Sales (WAR), Eil Conner-Maling (BOU), Sass Clarke (KIN), Carolyn Gordon (KIN), Ged Hickman (KIN)

2025.047: Presentation from Workcare West Midlands (WWM)

We have welcomed Lindsay Melvin, WorkCare West Midlands Lead Officer to our meeting to speak to us about WorkCare West Midlands. Lindsay has shared with us a paper called "Macro and Micro strategy – April 2025", which has recently been approved by WWM Trustees. The paper was not received in time to be published in the AM papers, but has been circulated separately and paper copies have been handed out this evening.

WWM was formed from an amalgamation of WorkCare Coventry & Warwickshire, and Churches and Industry Group Birmingham-Solihull (CIGB). It covers most of the West Midlands except for the Black Country, plus some areas of North Warwickshire. It is a registered charity, funded ecumenically, run by a board of Trustees including representatives of all the major Christian denominations. It runs chaplaincy training courses locally and has around 40 chaplains, split roughly 50/50 between retail and company chaplaincies. It works with various other Chaplaincy bodies, including Black Country Urban Industrial Mission. CEQ has given financial support to the original organisations for a long time and has donated £7,000 to WWM this year. We received a letter of thanks from them which was included in the Notices in the March 2025 Area Meeting papers.

WWM's aim, on a Macro basis within the UK, is to raise the profile of chaplaincy in places of worship, businesses and with the general public, recognising the good work already being accomplished. The strategy paper uses the image of a three-legged stool, with the legs representing chaplains and their places of worship, places of work, and supporting and equipping chaplains. One of the aims is to establish a Chaplaincy Sunday (to be known as Workplace Chaplaincy Sunday) where a place of worship prays for the chaplains in their midst and explains to worshippers what a chaplain does and why it is such important ministry.

The micro strategy uses the same image of a three-legged stool, but distilling down to the West Midlands, so establishing a Workplace Chaplaincy Sunday in Birmingham, Coventry, Warwick and as many towns in the West Midlands as possible.

The paper sets out the aims and actions associated with each of the strategies.

There are plans to create a readily accessible national library online, and an online chaplaincy support service is being considered, which might be called "Listening Ear". Quakers have an initiative called "Quaker Listening Space" which might be a useful tool for WWM.

With regard to the lack of networking between individual organisations, Lindsay is trying to address this by setting up liaison meetings, initially in Birmingham and Coventry. With regard to multi-faith, WWM is essentially a Christian/Ecumenical body but Lindsay is hoping to establish closer liaison with other faiths in specific locations.

Quakers have been invited to serve as a Trustee and to join a "Council of Reference", which would operate in addition to the board to hear updates on progress, to offer suggestions on how to enhance the vision, and to connect with organisations who "share our heart for this work and cover us in prayer".

We thank Lindsay for his presentation and look forward to participating in WWM initiatives.

We ask Nominations Committee to look for names to serve on the Council of Reference and will explore the Trustee opportunity further when we have received terms of reference for both roles from WWM.

2025.048: Peacemakers Future Strategy

A report on Peacemakers future strategy is printed in the Area Meeting booklet and Sara Hagel and Simon Best have spoken to it.

Peacemakers is a branch of Central England Area Quaker Meeting established in 1987, providing peace education in the West Midlands. In 2023 Peacemakers started a 3-year project funded by the Sir James Reckitt Charity (SJRC) to increase the *national* uptake of peace education (for ages 7-11). The grant finishes at the end of 2025.

For nearly three years Peacemakers has therefore been working on a more national scale (meaning essentially "beyond West Midlands"). The question has arisen: should Peacemakers continue to do peace education on a more national level?

After much discussion and discernment, the Peacemakers Management Committee are proposing that Peacemakers continues to work beyond the borders of West Midlands, as a national charity. As a result of this, Peacemakers would become an independent charity as it could not remain part of CEQ, a charity whose remit is regional. Following initial consideration of the proposal today, we hope that it can go to Local Meetings for further discernment, returning to June Area Meeting for a decision. Area Meeting Trustees would also have the opportunity to consider this proposal at their meeting in May.

The deliberations that have led to this proposal are set out in the Area Meeting paper

In January 2025, Sara Hagel, the Director of Peacemakers for the last 16 years announced that she would be leaving at the end of 2025. This information feeds into the timing of this process, as recruitment for a new Director will start in July/August 2025, when the scope of this role has been confirmed. We feel blessed to have Peacemakers as a key part of our witness, and thank Sara for her inspirational leadership.

If the proposal is agreed in June we note that Peacemakers have requested "tapered funding" from CEQ for a number of years, which would need to be clearly defined, and continued use of office space at 41 Bull Street for a transitional period.

Peacemakers would like Friends to take this discussion to their Local Meetings for further deliberation and discernment.

Some questions that may help support the discussion are:-

- 1) Do you think there is a national need for peace education that covers peace within, peace between and peace in the world?
- 2) Do you think Peacemakers is in a good position to start to meet this wider need?
- 3) Are there other, better ways to meet the need?
- 4) Any new charity would be Quaker founded, and reflect Quaker values of peace and justice, are there other factors to be considered?
- 5) Given all the above discussion, are you in favour of Peacemakers leaving CEQ and becoming an independent charity to meet this need?
- 6) If you support the proposal do you think the timing of the next 18 months to two years is the right timeframe for this? What other thoughts do you have about this? If you don't support the proposal do you have other thoughts on Peacemakers' future direction?

For further information please contact:

Simon Best, Clerk of Management Committee at simonpjbest@gmail.com or

Sara Hagel, Director at sara@peacemakers.org.uk

The Clerks will be grateful if Local Meetings can consider this proposal at their business meetings in either May or June, and send comments, ideally in the form of a Minute, to the CEQ Office by 11 June.

2025.049: Community Justice Group (CJG) report

CJG have brought us their annual report. They met twice during 2024. The group receives updates and offers support to its members for the work they undertake on behalf of CEQ. At the September meeting it welcomed Lindsay Melvin, Lead Officer for the newly formed West Midlands Workcare, who provided a presentation on the work of the charity and their plans for 2025 and beyond. The group has also held discussions on the development in relation to IPP (a sentence of indeterminant length now illegal but still with many in custody not knowing if they will be released) and the practice of spiritual accompaniment. Members of the group include Tricia Bradbury, Claire Bowman, William Waddilove, Howard Saunders, Roderick Keefe and Marina Manassei.

A report from William Waddilove on the Quakers in Criminal Justice Conference held in March 2025 was received too late to be published in the AM papers, but has been circulated separately, and paper copies have been handed out this evening.

Tricia Bradbury has been Clerk for many years. The group thanks her for her service and continued hard work. Claire Bowman will be in the role of Clerk in 2025. We thank CJG very much for their report.

2025.050: Responding to Racism (R2R) report on their research project

R2R brought us a full and interesting report regarding the research project on Quaker connections in the Midlands to the transatlantic chattel slave trade and its allied industries. Discussions around this began in 2023 and in 2024 CEQ AM gave loving and financial support to this project which included Woodbrooke coordinator Rhiannon Grant. A steering group was set up. Originally there were nine volunteers which have since changed and several new volunteers have been acquired. They are open to new volunteers joining them at any time.

They have made a variety of connections, academic and otherwise, attended conferences and study days and online presentations of interest. They are interested in contacting other Friends researching this area and also other academic circles and wider church circles with individuals who may be researching similar fields of interests. They are now a year into the project.

Future Research

Their aim is to widen and disseminate knowledge of Midlands Quakers and their connection to the 18th and 19th century economic development of the UK. To consider developing ideas of Quakers attitudes to business practice and how those have changed and how they reflect trends in our wider society. To look at ideas of innocence, complicity, culpability and present-day responsibility to feed into CEQ's discussion and discernment of moves towards reparations in BYM. Finally, to look with other Friends in R2R at how this history illumines our attitude to race and informs our responses to present day racism.

We thank R2R group for their report, and note that they are planning to update Friends on other aspects of their work at a future Area Meeting. R2R members will also be pleased to visit Local Meetings, and possibly arrange workshops, on the research project or other aspects of their work.

2025.051: Families Weekend report

Over a damp weekend at the start of the spring half term holiday, 62 friends, ranging in age from 1 to 70 something, gathered for a Quaker family weekend. This was the first such weekend since 2014. The weekend was organised by CEQ and Worcestershire and Shropshire Area Meetings.

The weekend was a big hit with a total of 45 friends staying for the weekend at The Greenhouse, Barnes Close just south of Birmingham. And then another 17 joining as day visitors.

Highlights included amazing home-cooked food, a walk to the playground and café in Waseley Hills Country Park, water rockets, den building, singing, all age worship, games, crafts, and time spent relaxing on the sofas. Being self-catering helped to keep the costs down so that children were able to go free. Feedback from those who attended has been very positive and there are plans for two further weekends for which the dates have already been booked in November 2025 and June 2026.

Arthur aged 12 gave a full and interesting report of the weekend which started with getting lost down a farm track before eventually finding the house where they were staying, and finishing up with the final delicious breakfast and a very loud Quaker meeting with activities, followed by lunch.

2025.052: How the Truth has Prospered at Kings Heath Local Meeting

Kings Heath remains a small meeting (average 7 per meeting) but they have had an increase in attenders – if not regular and sustained. They held a Christmas breakfast before Meeting for Worship on one of the Sundays before Christmas.

2025.053: Attenders at Area Meeting

Rae Ritchie (AM CoClerk) has given us a brief introduction to this item.

We have been reminded of the Minute (2024.123) agreed on 23rd November 2024, arising from reflections on the morning workshop facilitated by Woodbrooke on “Belonging and Membership”. The Minute recorded the decision that *“if a Local Meeting feels that an attender is suitable to serve in a pastoral role, we as an Area Meeting will treat this nomination as we would the nomination of a member”*. Since November we have appointed a number of Attenders as Pastoral Friends.

With regard to attendance at Area Meeting we noted in the Minute that although we wish to be an inclusive Area Meeting that welcomes attenders, we are aware that an Area Meeting’s Meeting for Worship for Business is not a public meeting in the same way that a Meeting for Worship is. The Clerks agreed to continue discernment on this issue and to return with a response to a future Area Meeting.

The Clerks have now prepared a response and hope that it is acceptable as guidance for both attenders wishing to join an area meeting, and for Local Meetings selecting their representatives or supporting attenders wishing to join an Area Meeting. The guidance, as published in the area meeting papers, is set out in the context of relevant passages from Quaker Faith & Practice, and the Clerks propose to continue to use the language of welcome rather than permission. Regular attenders at a Local Meeting coming to an area meeting for the first time are encouraged to speak to their Local Meeting Clerk or elders about what to expect and how to come with heart and mind prepared. The Local Meeting clerk should also inform the Area Meeting Clerks that they will be joining for the first time so that they can be identified and supported.

We approve the new guidance and ask the Clerks to publish it for the benefit of Local Meetings, and to put it on the website in the “Eldership and Pastoral Care” policy section.

2025.054: Trustee Matters

a) Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting

Further to the Minute 2025.022 (c) agreed at Area Meeting held on 22nd February 2025 Sandra Berry, Clerk of Trustees, has updated us on progress with the laying down of Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting. The Communications group of Banbury and Evesham AM (with representatives joining from the other three Meetings) have agreed the following statement which is being shared with all Area Meetings involved:

“Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting are currently working in partnership with three neighbouring Area Meetings to explore options and possibilities for the transfer of Local Meetings currently in Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting. The three neighbouring Area Meetings are Central England Area Meeting, Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting and Worcester & Shropshire Area Meeting.

Friends will hopefully be reassured that this work is being explored with care and diligence by representatives from all four Area Meetings. This transfer group does not have the authority to make decisions on behalf of any of the Area Meetings, but is tasked with exploring all the challenges and issues, so that when the time comes for decisions to be made by Area Meetings, as much information as possible can be made available to inform any decisions. Friends may also be interested to know that many Area Meetings around Britain Yearly Meeting are currently having conversations about re-structuring or organising themselves differently.

We are planning to provide updates along this process with Frequently Asked Questions. If you are a member of Banbury & Evesham AM please let your Local Meeting Clerk(s) know if you have any specific questions about this process you would like to ask. For Friends in the neighbouring Area Meetings your Area Meeting Clerk or Clerk to Trustees may be the best contact at this time"

b) Trustee reporting

CEAQM Trustees currently meet four times a year and their next meeting is scheduled to take place on 13th May. Prior to this all the Trustee committees meet and they forward recommendations and observations to the full Trustee meeting. These committees are Property Committee, Finance Committee, Employment Committee and Records Advisory Committee, and they are made up of Trustees and non-Trustees. As there is no Meeting for Worship for Business for the Area Meeting in May, Trustees will bring any recommendations and/or updates to the Area Meeting in June.

2025.055: Minutes from Local Meetings

We have received the following Minute from Bournville Local Meeting from a Meeting for Worship for Business held on Sunday 6th April 2025:-

Minute 2025.37 Police Storming of Westminster Meeting House

Police stormed into Westminster Friends Meeting House on 27th March 2025 and arrested six young women who were having a meeting in a hired room about climate issues and Gaza.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain, said: "No-one has been arrested in a Quaker meeting house in living memory. This aggressive violation of our place of worship and the forceful removal of young people holding a protest group meeting clearly shows what happens when a society criminalises protest.

Freedom of speech, assembly, and fair trials are an essential part of free public debate which underpins democracy."

The forced entry was totally unacceptable and unnecessary, and the treatment of the people was very violent.

We have heard from Friends who attended the Meeting for Worship outside Scotland Yard on Thursday 3 April 2025.

We need to ensure the police are aware that we take a responsible approach to who we hire our Meeting Houses to and have a commitment to peace and non-violence. However we must not be frightened by this incident that might lead us to stop hiring our Meeting Houses. We have heard that Area Meeting Trustees will be considering the implications of this incident.

We have heard from Claire Bowman, who is currently chair of Churches Together in B30, that the incident has been shared through other local faith forums. There is a possibility of dialogue being arranged with West Midlands Police for them to try and understand how this incident has impacted Quakers in this region. Claire is liaising with Area Meeting Clerks and Area Meeting Clerk to Trustees on how to take this invitation forward.

We hope the matter will be considered by Area Meeting as well as working with other churches and faiths locally, and there will of course be individual actions.

We forward this minute to AM Clerks.

We are pleased to learn of the planned meeting between local faith forums (including Quakers) and the West Midlands Police, and are grateful to Claire Bowman for her involvement in setting this up.

Feedback from Friends who attended the Meeting for Worship outside New Scotland Yard on Thursday 3 April 2025 will be shared as a separate agenda item.

2025.056: Friends Acting Under Concern

a) Witness at the Reform UK Rally

On 28th March a group of 12 CEQ Quakers from five Meetings came together to witness against the divisive language and destructive attitudes of the Reform UK leadership and some of its members. This took place outside the Birmingham Arena for about one hour, followed by an organised walk to Centenary Square where music, poetry and speeches were staged through the efforts made by the coordinating group *Stand up to Racism*.

b) Meeting for Worship outside New Scotland New Yard

Following the police raid on Westminster Meeting House on the 27th March several Friends from Central England Area Meeting travelled down to London to attend a meeting for worship outside New Scotland Yard on Thursday, the 3rd April. Around 320 people of various faiths and none, gathered for a Quaker meeting on the pavement outside New Scotland Yard, headquarters of the Metropolitan Police. Sitting and standing in a large lozenge shape under a blue sky, some spoke, some sang and most kept their silence within the sounds of the street for 50 minutes. A parallel online Meeting for Worship easily reached Zoom's maximum capacity of 300. The power of a Quaker Meeting for Worship is its collective focus in an attentive stillness.

Siobhan Hair, Deputy Recording Clerk says "in a diverse society we need to be able to hear dissenting voices with respect. Forcibly preventing these from being heard, through law or police action is in no way democratic. People talking and peacefully demonstrating is not a threat to society but stopping them is".

c) Action against the Telford Arms fair 18th – 20th November 2025 and DSEI (Defence and Security Equipment International) Excel, London 9th – 12th September 2025

- Peace pilgrimage to Oxford to DSEI 1st - 8th September 2025.
- Protest/outreach opportunities at events at Telford International Centre
- To join the stop the Telford Arms WhatsApp organising group contact Jo Hindley.

d) Lakenheath Alliance for Peace

A number of local Quakers will be attending the Peace Camp at USAF Lakenheath from 14th – 26th of April. Lakenheath Alliance for Peace is dedicated to preventing the return of US nuclear weapons to the base.

2025.057: Membership Matters

(a) Application:

We have received an application for membership from:-

- Eli Conner-Maling (BOU)

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

(b) Journey into Membership:

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Lorna Foster (SOL) from Caroline Gibbs (SOL) and Robert Morris (HAL). We welcome Lorna into membership of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). We ask her visitors to welcome her, and the Clerk to write to her.

(c) Transfer Out Request:

Aileen Cook (SOL) has requested that her membership be transferred to Sussex West Area Meeting

(d) Transfer Out Confirmation

We have received notice of the transfer out of Anne Austin (COT) to Bristol Area Meeting

(e) Resignation:

We have received an email from Sybil Ruth (COT) expressing her wish to resign her membership of the Religious Society of Friends. Although she has not been attending Meeting for some time, Sybil was an active member of Cotteridge Local Meeting, serving for a time as an Elder, and served on the Steering Group of what was then known as the West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project (now Peacemakers).

She has become concerned about what she sees as a growing political activism within the Society, both at grass-roots level and in Friends House. Opting to resign has been a hard decision which she has been considering for a decade. We accept this request and ask the Clerk to write to her, sending her our love and warm wishes for the future.

2025.058: Nominations

a) Nominations Committee suggests:

Russell Steed (SOL) to serve as the Central England Quakers representative to Sibford School AGM
Elise Coblenz-Baumann (BUL) to serve on the Peace Hub Management Committee for three years from April 2025 to March 2028

Wendy Burnett (BUL) to serve as a Priory Rooms Director for another four years from June 2025 to May 2029

Esther Boyd (COT) to serve as an Area Meeting Trustee for a triennium from April 2025 to March 2028

Rosalie Rider (STO) to serve for a further triennium on Bursaries Committee from June 2025 to May 2028

Anne Ullathorne (COT) to serve as Area Meeting treasurer for a further year from June 2025 to May 2026

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

b) Appointment of Pastoral Friends

Selly Oak Local Meeting suggests Fran Wilde to serve as a Pastoral Friend from April 2025 to December 2026

Coventry Local Meeting suggests Chris Dunkley to serve as a Pastoral Friend from April 2025 to April 2028

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

(c) Appointments to Elders and Pastoral Friends support group:

Barbara Forbes (BUL) to serve from April 2025 to December 2027

Mina Tilt (HAL) to serve from April 2025 to December 2027

James Stacey (COV) to serve from April 2025 to December 2027

Diane Stobbs (COV) to serve from April 2025 to December 2027

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

(d) Release from service

Patricia Bennet (COT) as a Pastoral Friend

We thank our Friend for her service.

2025.059: Quakers in Britain

a) Britain Yearly Meeting and “All-Together Worship”

Britain Yearly Meeting 2025 will be held from Friday 23rd to Monday 26th May at Friends House, Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ and online. On Sunday 25th May there will be “All Together Worship”, a huge Meeting for Worship taking place in homes, Quaker Meeting Houses and other meeting places and at Friends House. Worship will start with prepared ministry and there will be some suggested activities to help Friends of all ages reach and remain in stillness. Elders will call Friends to give spoken ministry as led, including from Local Meetings, individuals joining online and those in Friends House. Local Meetings wishing to join need to register by Sunday 11th May (see link in the booklet).

b) Quaker Week 2025, 27th September to 5th October and World Quaker Day Sunday 5th October

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) have announced that the theme for World Quaker Day 2025 will be Love your Neighbour taking as its guiding scripture Galatians 5:14 “For the whole law can be summed up in this one command Love your neighbour as yourself”

c) Yearly Meeting Issues of The Friend

The 30th May issue will have comprehensive Yearly Meeting reports. Friends who are not currently subscribers may benefit from the eight weeks for £5 trial subscription. Those who get this deal before the end of April will be able to have access to and enjoy the essential Yearly Meeting reporting.

2025.060: Thanks and Next Meeting

We thank Kings Heath Friends (supported by Hall Green Friends) for their warm welcome and hospitality

We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Friday 16th May 2025 at Selly Oak Meeting House. There will be a Meeting for Worship from 6pm to 7pm suitable for all ages, preparing hearts and minds for Britain Yearly Meeting. Tea will be available from 5pm. We are arranging some activities for children and adults from 4pm, before tea, and inviting those attending Yearly Meeting to meet informally together after the close of Meeting for Worship at 7pm.

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