

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Warwick Meeting House and online on 28th June 2025

Clerk: Rae Ritchie Assistant Clerk: Paula Button

Elder: Jane Beale

Pastoral Friend: Jane Cunningham

2025.061: Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of our Friend Christine Johnson (BGR) on Thursday 5th June 2025 aged 88 years. We also heard two passages from *Quaker Faith and Practice*. First, Advices and Queries number 27:

Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?

Second, chapter 10.05:

We recognise a variety of ministries. In our worship these include those who speak under the guidance of the Spirit, and those who receive and uphold the work of the Spirit in silence and prayer. We also recognise as ministry service on our many committees, hospitality and childcare, the care of finance and premises, and many other tasks. We value those whose ministry is not in an appointed task but is in teaching, counselling, listening, prayer, enabling the service of others, or other service in the meeting or the world.

The purpose of all our ministry is to lead us and other people into closer communion with God and to enable us to carry out those tasks which the Spirit lays upon us.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

2025.062: Representatives

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

The Clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today: David Ward (BOU), Ruth Stagg (COV), Jane Cunningham (WAR) and Margaret Hogg (WAR).

The Clerks welcome the following member of other Area Meetings joining us today: Gill Grimshaw (Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting). They also welcome Sara Hagel, Director of Peacemakers.

2025.063: Reflections on the Morning Workshop

This morning our Friend Heather Rowlands (COT) facilitated a workshop on exploring our spiritual gifts during which we reflected on the role of our bodies in our gifts and how our sense of our gifts has changed over time. This was in part about what we can contribute to our Quaker communities, but also a chance to think about who we are and what we have to offer the world. We were also reminded that simply being present in Meeting for Worship is a way of sharing our gifts.

We thank Heather for a thought-provoking and enjoyable session, which provided a much welcome opportunity to get to know one another in the things that are eternal.

2025.064: Reflections and Matters Arising from Britain Yearly Meeting

Since we last met, Britain Yearly Meeting has been held at Friends House in London. Members of Central England Quakers attended, both online and in person, and took part in the main programme

as well as the children and young people's programme. We heard how valued these programmes for children and young people are, both for those taking part and their families. Providing these programmes takes a lot of work and we thank those who are able to offer this as service. They enable a rewarding experience for those in their care.

We have also heard about the deep sense of the spirit at work during the creation of the minute about Gaza, which took time and great care. We are reminded that we seek neither consensus nor a majority view in our decisions but a sense of what is God's will on that day. Those of us who were not present in the room or online also have an important role to play in upholding the process and trusting the discernment that emerges.

We ask the Clerks to forward this minute to the Recording Clerk.

2025.065: Trustee Matters

(a) Social media

We have heard from Sandra Berry, Clerk to Trustees, that the Charity Commission requires Central England Quakers to have a social media policy. The Trustees have prepared a policy based on a Charity Commission template, with some adaptations. The Area Meeting Outreach and Communications Officer, Pete Doubtfire, has also provided his feedback.

We ask Local Meetings to consider the policy and provide feedback in the form of a minute to the Area Meeting Office by 8th October 2025.

(b) Future support in managing CEAQM property

Trustees have provided an outline of their thinking on managing Central England Quaker property, which explores a range of different scenarios. There is support for the general principle of increased support in managing property but also concern that local circumstances and relationships are recognised.

We ask Trustees to take their proposals forward and then return to Area Meeting in the autumn. We also encourage Local Meetings with any specific feedback or questions to contact the Clerk to Trustees or their Link Trustee.

(c) Supreme court judgement in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and subsequent interim guidance from EHRC

Britain Yearly Meeting has provided some guidance to Area Meeting Clerks and Clerks to Trustees regarding the supreme court judgement in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and subsequent interim guidance from EHRC. The Quaker context for this is given from Minute 31, YM 2021: "We seek to provide places of worship and community that are welcoming and supportive to trans and non-binary people who want to be among us."

The current view from BYM is as follows:

What it might mean for Quaker Meetings:

- Reviewing the toilet and other hygiene and changing facilities you provide, and how we describe them – (noting that there are different requirements for workplace facilities and public-facing facilities)
- Considering long-term strategy on building development
- Being ready to respond to questions and concerns from a variety of directions

*What it does **not** mean for Quaker Meetings:*

- That we can no longer be welcoming to trans and non-binary people
- That we must enforce a sex-based toilet and facilities policy
- That we can require people to tell or prove to us their sex assigned at birth

- Immediate capital works to completely redesign facilities

Why are we only talking about toilets?

Quaker Meetings don't generally provide single sex services. Our toilet facilities are the only place where we might be considered to provide single sex services, so on a practical level it's the thing we need to think about in response to this judgment.

At our CEAQM trustee meeting in May, we minuted that this is a complex and sensitive issue and that guidance is still being updated by various organisations. In order to understand the impact, we feel a first step will be to audit the facilities at each of our properties so that we can assess the extent of the risks in not being compliant and property correspondents have been asked to send in details to Sarah Barker, Principal Officer. It would also be helpful to know of any plans Local Meetings have for adapting their facilities.

2025.066: Peacemakers Future Strategy

At our Area Meeting in April, we heard from Sara Hagel, Director, and Simon Best, convenor of the Management Committee, about plans for Peacemakers to expand its work beyond the borders of the West Midlands and fulfil a need for peace education of the kind they provide at a national level. This requires Peacemakers becoming a separate charity as CEQ's remit is regional.

We have now received feedback from Bournville, Bull Street, Cotteridge, Coventry, Hartshill, Kings Heath, Selly Oak, Stourbridge, Sutton Coldfield, Walsall and Warwick Local Meetings, which are included in the papers. These minutes express enormous pride in Peacemakers and all it has achieved over the decades. There is also clearly trust in the discernment of Peacemakers and its management committee: if they believe that becoming an independent national organisation is the right step for them, then we support that move, while acknowledging that this is a bittersweet moment for CEQ.

We ask CEQ Trustees to work with Peacemakers Management Committee to create a proposal for consideration at a future Area Meeting outlining a tapered programme of support for the organisation as this transition takes place. This should state what level of financial support will continue and for how long as well as details of how use of 41 Bull Street will continue and for how long.

2025.067: Updates Following the Police Action at Westminster Meeting House

Since we last met in March, several Friends have received a response from their MP about the raid on Westminster Meeting House. These have all been a standard template answer with some minor additions.

Since we met, there has also been a meeting between a group of CEQ Friends and the West Midlands Police. Details of this meeting are in the papers and in this week's issue of *the Friend*. Representatives of the police at this meeting asked if a Quaker representative could attend the regular online fortnightly multi-faith meetings. We ask Nominations to look for a name or names of Friends who feel able to undertake this task, which we acknowledge could be a useful opportunity to open more dialogue between us.

The police also asked for a nominated "first responder" to act as a contact person for when they have questions or concerns that they wish to discuss. We suggest that Sarah Barker, Principal Officer, is put forward as a point of contact but that we use the language of contact, not response, as response suggests that we will take action based on police requests or concerns. We do, however, welcome greater communication.

Trustees are also taking this opportunity to reflect upon and investigate the risks we face, particularly in terms of donations and lettings. We recognise that acknowledging risk does not necessarily mean acting upon it. As Quakers, our assessment of risk may differ from that of other organisations and charities. As *Advices and Queries* states, "Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes."

2025.068: Leighton Park General Meeting Report

This was held on Friday 28th March 2025 with a tour of the school in the morning and a Business Meeting in the afternoon which several governors stayed to attend.

The older parts of the building are gradually being replaced with new, luxurious, if more “normal”, structures. The community is now nearly 600 pupils with over 100 teaching staff, and a very manifestly Quaker ethos. The headmaster has a genuine commitment to Quaker values, especially integrity and speaking truth to power, in his own life and work as well as that of the school. Although sadly he is leaving this summer.

The school has a strong academic record as well as extra curriculum opportunities for personal development, providing a broad education. They also contribute to their local community. Most pupils are fee paying. There are no Quaker staff and fewer than twenty Quaker pupils. The value-led approach is viewed as being a significant strength which is appreciated by everyone.

We thank Jane Mills for this report.

2025.069: Membership Matters

(a) Death

We have heard of the death of our Friend Christine Johnson (BGR), on Thursday 5th June 2025 aged 88 years. A joint memorial meeting for Christine and Michael Johnson is planned for later in the year and further details will be shared as they become available.

(b) Journey into Membership

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Fiona Campbell (COT) from Anne Giles and Ted Raybould. We welcome Fiona 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) Application for Membership

We have received an application for membership from Suzie Dench (HAR). We ask our Nominations Committee to find Friends to visit Suzie and to report back to us with the names.

(d) Transfer in request

We have received a transfer request from Teesdale and Cleveland Area Meeting for the transfer of Heather and Patricia Wood (SEL) 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.

(e) Transfer out confirmation

We have received confirmation of the transfer out of Aileen Cook (SOL) to Sussex West Area Meeting.

(f) Transfer out request

We have received a transfer out request for Susan Groves (BOU) to Quaker Community Western Cape in Southern Africa Yearly Meeting.

(g) Internal Transfer

Mark Russ from the Unattached list to Bournville Local Meeting.

(h) Notice of Marriage

Jonathan Bowmer (not in membership) and Kate Nicholls (WAR, not in membership) on Saturday 21st June at 2.30pm at Warwick Meeting House.

2025.070: Nominations

a) Nominations Committee suggests

Jim Green (WAL) to serve as an Area Meeting Trustee for another triennium from June 2025 to May 2028

Terry Stanley (BUL) to serve on Trustees Property Committee for another triennium from July 2025 to June 2028

Peter Ullathorne (COT) to serve on Trustees Property Committee for another triennium from July 2025 to June 2028

Roger Chapman (WAR) to serve as a Priory Rooms director for another four years from July 2025 to June 2029
James Bradbury (STO) to serve on Outreach and Communications Committee for a triennium from July 2025 to June 2028
Howard Saunders (BOU) and Tina Helfrich (COT) to visit Ell Conner-Maling on her journey into Membership

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

b) Release from service

Claire Bowman (BOU) as Ecumenical and Interfaith Coordinator
Christine Terry (BOU) from the Outreach and Communications Committee

We thank our Friends for their service.

2025.071: Minute of Record: Scattering of Ashes

Minute 25/26 from Warwick Local Meeting: Scattering of ashes of Dorothy Sheila Parry

We have received a minute of record from Warwick Local Meeting and we retrospectively agree to the scattering of Dorothy Sheila Parry's ashes at Warwick Meeting which took place at the Memorial Meeting held to celebrate her life held on Saturday 17th May 2025.

2025.072: How the Truth has Prospered at Warwick Local Meeting

We have received a report on how the Truth has prospered at Warwick Local Meeting. The Meeting has welcomed new attenders over the past year, including more children and young people, some of whom are involved with the wider Quaker community.

The Meeting nurtured its spiritual life through regular Meetings for Learning and Bible Study Group as well as an away day. Members have also found the Preparing for Change in Old Age group a useful safe space for exploring this stage of life.

The Meeting House and its garden provide a valued space for the local community, including newcomers to the area who attend the ecumenical Conversation Café.

2025.073: Minutes from Local Meetings

We have received a minute from Warwick Local Meeting. It is suggested that having a list of possible topics and facilitators for Meetings for Learning could be a valuable resource which could be developed.

We ask the Area Meeting Clerks to liaise with Anna Lyons (WAR) and Elders and PF Support Group to develop this.

2025.074: Quaker Week and World Quaker Day

The theme for World Quaker Day on Sunday 5th October 2025 will be "Love Your Neighbour", taking as the guiding scripture Galatians 5:14: "For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" CEQ Area Meeting hope to produce a calendar of events for Quaker Week which is 27th September to 5th October 2025, so please let the office know if you are planning anything.

We have been reminded that World Quaker Day is hugely important to many different Quaker communities around the world and provides a time to learn about them and their traditions. A film about the 2024 Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) plenary will be available on the FWCC website to support this (<https://fwcc.world/>).

We have also been reminded that Quaker Week is a valuable opportunity for outreach, with the Quaker Meeting at Oakwood Prison now marking the occasion every year.

2025.075: Thanks and next Meetings

We thank Warwick Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, at 6pm on Wednesday 23rd July 2025 at Hall Green Meeting House. Tea will be available from 5pm.

There will also be a Meeting for Worship between 2pm and 3pm on Saturday 16th August 2025 at Sutton Coldfield Meeting House, preceded by lunch at 1pm and before that, in the morning, by a guided walk or cycle in Sutton Park – if you would like to join either of those activities, please contact Cathy Khurana (scquakers@outlook.com).

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Rae Ritchie, clerk this time