

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Coventry Meeting House and online on 27th September 2025

Clerk: Rae Ritchie Assistant Clerk: Paula Button
Elders: Eleanor Nesbitt and Karima Brooke
Pastoral Friend: Chris Dunkley

2025.090: Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of our Friends Dorothy White (COT) on 21st August 2025 aged 97, Ruth Johns (WAR) on 21st September 2025 aged 91 and Bill Evans (WAR) on 24th September 2025 aged 91. We also heard from Quaker Faith and Practice 24.49:

People matter. In the end human rights are about people being treated and feeling like people who matter. We are reminded graphically of violations of human rights far away and near at hand. In ignorance or knowingly we all violate human rights. We are all involved in the exercise of power and the abuse of power.

The multitude and complexity of the problems of oppression and injustice often seem to overwhelm us. We can do something. Friends are already working in a variety of ways: through international bodies, through voluntary organisations and by personal witness. Those who can give something of their lives to human rights require our support and we can look for opportunities to help those in need around us. At the international level we affirm our support of Friends World Committee for Consultation and other bodies in ensuring that the standards and ideals of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights are attained, that the world does not slip backwards.

Above all we must take risks for God: look around us to the people who need help; listen to those who experience oppression; engage in the mutual process of liberation.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

2025.091: Representatives

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

The Clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today: Eli Conner-Maling (BOU), Francesca Rogers (COV), Chris Dunkley (COV), Rose Eccles (COT), Bethan Eccles (COT) and Pete Doubtfire (BUL).

2025.092: Junior Yearly Meeting Reports

We have received reports from Rose Eccles and Natasha Edelsten about Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) held in May in parallel to Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). The theme was "How do we create the peace we need within ourselves and our communities?" and Rose told us that she found the talk about the twelve habits of being a reconciler particularly inspiring. It is still with her today, several months later. She also highlighted how meaningful the daily prologues and epilogues were.

In their reports, Rose and Natasha share other details from the weekend too, including the social activities and fellowship experienced. We are glad that they got so much from attending JYM and thank them for their reports. We also ask Friends to uphold Rose as she serves on the Arrangements Committee for JYM in the coming year. The theme for JYM 2026 is 'In a divided world, are we living our values to foster acceptance and belonging?' A question for us all to consider in the year ahead too.

2025.093: Memorial minutes

We heard memorial minutes for our Friends Christine Johnson, of Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting, and Dorothy Sheila Parry, of Warwick Local Meeting. Both memorial minutes are printed in the Area Meeting papers.

2025.094: Membership Matters

(a) Deaths

We record the death of our Friends Dorothy White (COT) on 21st August 2025 aged 97, Ruth Johns (WAR) on 21st September 2025 aged 91 and Bill Evans (WAR) on 24th September 2025 aged 91.

We also record the following minute from Cotteridge Local Meeting:

2025/35 Death of Dorothy White

We record with sadness the death of our Friend Dorothy Martha White on 22nd August 2025. She had been a member of Cotteridge meeting for many years having served as elder and being active on premises and other committees. She was also committed to supporting Oak Tree House and the Woodlands Quaker Home. In accord with her wishes we will not be preparing a memorial minute.

(b) Journeys into Membership

We have received a report on the journey into membership of Eli Conner-Maling (BOU) from Howard Saunders (BOU) and Tina Helfrich (COT) and this has been read to us. We have also received a report on the journey into membership of Suzie Dench (HAR) from Paul Hewitt (HAR) and Eleanor Nesbitt (COV) and this has been read to us too.

We welcome both Eli and Suzie 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.

2025.095: Nominations

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE SUGGESTS:

James Bradbury (STO) to serve on Clerks Advisory Committee for a triennium from September 2025 to August 2028

Becky Shirley (SUT) to serve as our representative on Young Friends General Meeting from September 2025 to August 2028 and Eddie Rugg (WAR) to serve as our alternate also for the period September 2025 to August 2028

Roderick Keefe (COT) to serve as our representative on the West Midlands Police Faiths Forum from September 2025 to August 2028

Nicholas Tulley (BOU) to serve as a Talking Friend Trustee for another triennium from July 2025 to June 2028

Mina Tilt (HAL) to serve as our representative on the Pray 24 Brum planning committee

These names being acceptable, we appoint our Friends accordingly.

RELEASE FROM SERVICE:

Cathy Khurana from Clerks Advisory Committee as she will now attend ex-officio as an Area Meeting co-clerk

We thank our Friend for their service.

2025.096: Trustee Matters

The Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting transfer group meet regularly, and Central England Area Quaker Meeting (CEAQM) is represented by the Clerk to Trustees and the Principal Officer. There is also a separate communications group and eldership and pastoral support group, with John Cox Woolven from Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting supporting the latter from CEAQM.

Banbury and Evesham Trustees have gathered a great deal of information as part of the due diligence process, and trustees are in the midst of analysing this. CEAQM trustees plan to hold an extra trustee meeting so that further information can be brought to November Area Meeting at the latest. We expect that some Friends are wondering why the process is taking so long and why there is not clear end date as yet. The four Area Meetings involved are all independent charities, and there

are many issues to do with finance, property ownership, and charity law which have to be considered carefully. This is not just to comply with the law, but to make sure the actions we take will lead to the best outcome: to encourage thriving Meetings and give loving support, both practical and spiritual, for all Friends involved.

2025.097: Trustee Annual Report and Accounts

Trustees have brought to Area Meeting their Annual Report and Accounts for 2024. These were approved by Trustees on 12th August 2025 and have been signed and submitted to the Charity Commission and Britain Yearly Meeting. Overall, it was a good year for Central England Quakers with regular Meetings for Worship and witness activities taking place. Income and expenditure have been broadly consistent with previous years although we reported a deficit of £57,593.

A copy of the report and accounts is available in the Area Meeting papers. The documents are also published on the Central England Quakers website and paper copies are available from the Central England Quakers office on request.

We encourage all Friends to read these documents ahead of the Area Meeting in November, when there will be an opportunity to ask questions. It would be helpful if these could 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. The budget for 2026 will also be considered at the November meeting.

2025.098: Reflections on the Morning Workshop

This morning Sarah Barker, Central England Quakers Principal Officer, Sandra Berry, Clerk to Trustees, and Anne Ullathorne, Area Meeting Treasurer, led a profoundly helpful workshop exploring the next steps of the “What does love require of us?”, a process which began with the extraordinary Area Meeting held at Woodbrooke in May 2022 and continued with the “What does love require of us?” special working group before being passed to Trustees.

The workshop began with a reminder of the structure of our Area Meeting and the legal requirements that arise from being a registered charity as well as all the work that we as an Area Meeting actually do. We were then tasked in small groups with allocating an imaginary £100,000 across ten areas of Quaker work and witness: an activity that highlighted the challenges of discerning our priorities. What do we want to spend our money on? If we choose to spend on one category, how does that affect the funds available for other activities?

We then discussed ways that we could raise more money as an Area Meeting. Again, this was both thought provoking and challenging. Are our meeting houses a financial asset to be realised or a form of outreach in our communities? These are big questions, with no easy answers, and are all issues that we need to bear in mind as an Area Meeting and in our Local Meetings as we approach the time of year when budgets are decided. If we want to do more, we need more.

2025.099: How the Truth has Prospered at Coventry Local Meeting

We have received a report from Coventry Local Meeting about how the Truth has prospered over the last 12 months. The full report, included in the Area Meeting papers, explores worship, regular activities, outreach and wider Quaker involvement as well as challenges – many of which will be familiar to other Local Meetings. There is also an update on fundraising for the Meeting House refurbishment, which the whole Meeting has been involved in supporting. We are glad to hear that the Meeting feels supported by Area Meeting in this endeavour.

2025.100: Behaviour Policy

A draft policy for managing behaviour and/or language that may cause harm was shared as a separate document alongside the Area Meeting papers. This has been adapted from a document created by Manchester and Warrington Area Meeting by Central England Quakers (CEQ) Trustees, CEQ Elders and Pastoral Friends and CEQ Area Meeting Clerks.

The policy is intended to put in place a framework for supporting Friends to respond when an individual's behaviour or language in a meeting or group is inappropriate, unacceptable or harmful but does not cross the safeguarding threshold. It may also help to prevent behaviour escalating to being a safeguarding concern.

We believe that the policy will be useful for Meetings and indeed some Friends have already found the draft version helpful for dealing with difficult situations. We are also reminded of the need for respect for Friends who may be experiencing distress or difficulties that impact their behaviour and sensitivity when handling situations where interpretations of particular behaviour or language differ.

Friends would welcome more training and guidance to help them understand the issues involved and we ask the Safeguarding team to consider how this could be taken forward. Friends would also welcome a simplified step-by-step process to follow as well as a poster or other similar summary of the rights and responsibilities we all have to uphold safe and inclusive meetings.

We ask all Local Meetings to consider the policy over the next few months and to share their discernment with the Area Meeting office by 10th January 2026. This discernment may relate to the overall structure and principles of the policy or be specific feedback about what they would find helpful.

2025.101: Bursaries Committee Report

We thank the Bursaries Committee for their report, which is included in the Area Meeting papers. The Committee would like to remind Friends that they can help with the cost of attending Quaker events and courses; details of how to apply and what information is required are outlined in the report. The Committee also encourages Pastoral Friends and others to periodically remind people in their meetings about bursary support as this can enable Friends to broaden their experience of the Quaker way. Such financial assistance can be particularly valuable to families wishing to attend residential gatherings as the costs for several people to go can be much greater.

2025.102: Peace Hub Report

We have received a report from the Peace Hub reflecting on a busy year which has seen both its tenth anniversary and its transition to a new strategy. Since the move away from the drop-in model, the Peace Hub co-ordinator, Pete Doubtfire, has been better able to focus on its three strategic priorities. He described the work as like a laboratory for peace, helping others to develop a personal sense of peace, interpersonal peace and challenging the big power structures.

The report is accompanied by a Treasurer's report, which also reflects upon the significant change in how Peace Hub operates. The Treasurer expresses gratitude to individual Friends and Local Meetings that already provide financial support but asks that all Local Meetings consider making a donation – however small – towards this work in 2026. A donation early in the year would be particularly helpful during the period of transition from one way of working to another.

As well as contributing to funds, Friends can get involved in peace and social justice issues through in-person workshops in November and February, details of which will be shared on the Central England Quaker website and newsfeed, and the Peace Hub focus group. The group is planning an in-person lunch in December but usually meets monthly online and provides an opportunity to share concerns and opportunities for action around these issues. For more details, contact Pete via email, phone, WhatsApp or Signal (office@peacehub.org.uk and 07718 937156).

We thank Pete for his work on our behalf and the Peace Hub management committee for its support.

2025.103: SDSC-UK Arms Fair Relocation to Birmingham in 2026

Thanks to successful peace campaigning, a few years ago, one of the largest arms fairs in the UK moved from Malvern to Telford. Now, thanks again to a peace campaign involving direct action, traditional protest, community engagement and engagement with other users of the venue, the Specialist Defence and Security Convention (SDSC-UK) arms fair planned for November 2025 has been cancelled.

The SDSC-UK organisers are now planning to relocate to the NEC in Birmingham for an arms fair on 3rd-4th February 2026. Planning is underway to continue a similar peace campaign, including a protest on the open day of the event. Friends interested in finding out how they can get involved or support the campaign in others ways should contact the Peace Hub co-ordinator Pete Doubtfire via email, phone, WhatsApp or Signal (office@peacehub.org.uk and 07718 937156).

2025.106: Friends Acting Under Concern

(a) Minute from Cotteridge Local Meeting

We have received the following minute from Cotteridge Local Meeting:

2025/42 Record of arrest: We record the arrest of our Friend Jo Hindley on 6th September 2025 in Parliament Square supporting Lift the Ban organised by Defend our Juries. She was arrested under Section 13 of the Terrorism Act, bailed and not yet charged. We forward this minute to CEQ Area Meeting.

We hold our Friend Jo Hindley in the light. We also encourage all Local Meetings to keep Area Meeting Clerks informed of any other Friends arrested when acting under concern.

(b) Court support information

There is a WhatsApp group organising court support for our Friend Rajan Nadau (SEL) and his co-defendants at their trial for action at Stonehenge in June 2024. The trial begins on Monday 20th October at Salisbury Crown Court and may last up to two weeks. Friends are welcome to join to give in-person or remote support (<https://chat.whatsapp.com/KmwhEEOkJST5QuUwRVYsLq>).

2025.105: Hosting Area Meeting in 2026

Since the Area Meeting papers went to print, we have received further offers from Local Meetings to host the remaining dates in 2026 and a finalised calendar for the year will be circulated with the minutes from this meeting.

2025.106: Thanks and next meeting

We thank Coventry Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, at Bournville Meeting House on Thursday 23rd October at 6pm, with tea from 5pm.

We will meet at Bull Street Meeting House on Saturday 22nd November. There will be a workshop exploring the themes of love thy neighbour, community, conflict and division between 10.45 and 12.45, with lunch at 1pm and Area Meeting at 2pm. Please note that this is a change to the previously advertised workshop topic.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Rae Ritchie, clerk this time