

**Minutes of Central England Area Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
held at Bournville Meeting House and online
On 23rd October 2025**

Co-clerks: Paula Button, Cathy Khurana

Elder: Robin Bowman

Pastoral Friend: Anne Giles

2025/107: Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of our Friends Mollie McDonald (SOL) on 15th October 2025 and Michael Langford (HAL) on 11th October aged 101.

We have heard in ministry about Michael's deep faith and how important Quakerism and Hall Green Meeting were in his life.

We also heard from Quaker Faith and Practice, Chapter 29, Leadings, 29.01.

How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We must learn to put our trust in God and the leadings of the Spirit. How many of us are truly led by the Spirit throughout our daily lives? I have turned to God when I have had a difficult decision to make or when I have sought strength to endure the pain in dark times. But I am only slowly learning to dwell in the place where leadings come from. That is a place of love and joy and peace, even in the midst of pain. The more I dwell in that place, the easier it is to smile, because I am no longer afraid.

If we dwell in the presence of God, we shall be led by the spirit. We do well to remember that being led by the spirit depends not so much upon God, who is always there to lead us, as upon our willingness to be led. We need to be willing to be led into the dark as well as through green pastures and by still waters. We do not need to be afraid of the dark, because God is there. The future of this earth need not be in the hands of the world's 'leaders'. The world is in God's hands if we are led by God. Let us be led by the Spirit. Let us walk with a smile into the dark.

Gordon Matthews, 1987

2025/108: Representatives

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

The Clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today: Allie Maryland (BOU), Sass Clarke (KIN), Willemina Morton (SEL)

2025/109: Friends Southern Summer Events – Reports and epistles

Eight young people from Central England Area Meeting attended Friends Southern Summer Events this year. These events are Junior Gathering for 11 – 14 year olds and Senior Conference for 15 – 18 year olds, both held at Leighton Park School, Reading.

We have received written reports on Junior Gathering from two of our Young People, and one from a Young Person who attended Senior Conference, and the epistles from both events. Extracts from the epistles have been read aloud to us. The enthusiasm and joy expressed in these reports and epistles was inspiring to hear. We thank our Young People for their reports and contribution to our meeting this evening.

2025/110: Membership Matters

(a) Deaths:

We record the deaths of the following Friends: Michael Langford (HAL) on 11th October aged 101; Mollie McDonald (SOL) on 15th October 2025 aged 100; Ruth Johns (WAR) died 21st September 2025 aged 91; Bill Evans (WAR) died 24th September 2025 aged 91.

(b) Transfer Out Request:

We have received a request for a Transfer Out for Stuart Gallagher (STO) to Worcestershire and Shropshire Area Meeting.

2025/111: Trustee Matters

Further to Minute 2025.096 Sandra Berry, Clerk to Trustees, has updated us on the Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting (BEAM) transfer project.

CEQ Trustees met earlier this month to discuss the current proposal to move Ettington Local Meeting and Stratford Upon-Avon Local Meeting into our Area Meeting. The former meeting house at Shipston (currently leased to the Local Authority for use as a library), is also being considered as part of these moves.

The key role for trustees in this discernment process is to consider the risks, whether they be financial, reputation, legal etc... Looking at all the information provided to them by Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting Trustees, CEQ trustees' current view is that there are levels of risk in the proposal that give us cause for concern and that Banbury and Evesham need to review the current proposals. Sandra Berry, has spoken with the Clerk to Trustees for Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting and was heartened by the reminder of the three benefits set out by BEAM at the start of this project:

1. Quaker worship and witness continues and thrives in the 6 LMs currently held in BEAM with similar numbers of members and attenders as now
2. This is a time for taking stock of our worshipping communities and checking with receiving meetings that we meet their expectations too, so we can safely integrate our LMs into their structures. If a meeting cannot continue in its current form, we will recognise that and see how we sustain our Quaker worship for those friends affected.
3. If BEAM becomes non-viable - we take steps to manage this within Quaker business instead of calling in the receivers.

Other Area Meetings involved are also expressing their concerns about the proposal and so we are not alone. We want to support friends in Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting as much as we can and being honest about the risks and their impact on us, is all part of this.

We plan to return to this item in November.

Sandra Berry

Clerk to Trustees, Central England Quakers

25/112: Nominations

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE SUGGESTS:

Heather Smithson (BOU) to serve on Records Advisory Committee for a triennium from November 2025 to October 2028.

Mick Bickerton (BGR) to serve on Outreach and Communications Committee for a triennium from November 2025 to October 2028.

BARNT GREEN AND REDDITCH LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

Lesley Morgan to serve as an elder for a triennium from November 2025 to October 2028.

STOURBRIDGE LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

John Lampen, Julia Furminger and Carole Pannell to serve as Elders from January 2026 to December 2026.

Tricia Bradbury, Rosalie Rider and Judith Parkin to serve as Pastoral Friends from January 2026 to December 2026.

WARWICK LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

Anna Lyon to serve as an elder for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028.

Frances Rutter to serve as a Pastoral Friend from January 2026 to December 2028.

These names being acceptable, we appoint our Friends accordingly.

RELEASE FROM SERVICE

Paula Button (WAR) as a Pastoral Friend from January 2026.

Ann James (WAR) as a Pastoral Friend and from Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group from January 2026.

We thank our Friends for their service.

2025/113: Responding to Racism report

We have received a report from the Responding to Racism Group and Stuart Morton has spoken to it and answered our questions. We have also heard from Val Jenner who attends the Britain Yearly Meeting Reparations Group - historic work stream; Stuart Morton and Donald Stubbings also attend the BYM Racial Justice Network.

The R2R Group has met regularly, facilitated several workshops, and attended various demonstrations as well as continuing their research project, examining Quaker connections in the Midlands to the Transatlantic Chattel Slave Trade and its allied industries.

They plan to continue to organise events for 2026 in order to share their work with Friends in CEQ and possibly the wider community. These include a workshop on how to bridge the narrative of division within British Society on February 7th at Selly Oak Meeting House led by Pete Doubtfire; an ecumenical meeting for learning, and further workshops for Quaker meetings in CEQ.

There is an ongoing invitation for others to join and strengthen R2R. The group increasingly recognises the importance of having friends of colour inside their discernment process.

In our discernment we have heard from several Friends about issues related to racism and the current rising divisions and distrust in wider society. We encourage friends to attend the Love Your Neighbour workshop on Saturday 22nd November where these matters will be discussed and explored.

The R2R Group was established to encourage and enable Friends to examine our own attitudes and the racism that exists in us all.

We thank R2R for their report and all their enthusiasm and commitment to this area of work.

2025/114: How the truth has prospered at Bournville Local Meeting

We have received a report from Bournville Local Meeting. This is a growing and vibrant Meeting. Regular meetings for learning take place and going forward these will be reflecting on issues in the world. There are always a variety for events happening to support and build community, to encourage outreach and to further their work with members of Churches Together. These include charity concerts, hosting talks, away days, being part of Bournville Heritage Open day, quiz nights and opening the Meeting House for the Bournville Christmas Festival.

Interchurch activities are well supported including creating a very large piece of work to support the Ocean World musical for the Church of St Francis in Bournville.

We thank Bournville Meeting for their Report.

2025/115: Meeting for Sufferings report

We have received a comprehensive report on Meeting for Sufferings held 3rd – 5th October from Esther Boyd who was able to attend this residential weekend at short notice when both our appointed representative and alternate were prevented.

The big topics for consideration were the theology of online and blended meetings, and the relationship between church and state, and copies of the prepared ministry on these themes were circulated with the AM papers.

Other matters included minutes from three area meetings in Scotland concerning proposed changes to their governance arrangements, the annual report on the work of Quaker World Relations Committee, and a report from the Agenda Planning Committee of Yearly Meeting. Plans for our next Yearly Meeting session in May 2026 were shared, the BYM annual report and accounts for 2024 received, and a report on the recent work of the Britain Yearly Meeting trustees.

Challenging questions to shape Quaker Life's support for meetings strategy 2026 – 2030 were considered in small groups:

- How our Quaker communities could look in the 2030s and beyond;
- What could be areas of priority for Quaker communities in the next 5 – 10 years;
- How can the support offer enable those priority areas to flourish and strengthen over the next five years.

All the papers and minutes of Meeting for Sufferings are available on the Quakers in Britain website and Esther's report contains many of the links to these papers.

In our discernment it was suggested that the matter of online worship and online participation, particularly in Britain Yearly Meeting, need wider discussion, and could form the basis of an Area Meeting workshop.

We thank Esther for her report and for representing CEQ at this meeting.

2025/116: Oak Tree House Advisory Committee

We have received the following minute from Area Meeting Nominations Committee held 2nd October 2025:

The Friends who have been serving on this committee (Oak Tree House Advisory Committee) are in agreement that it should be laid down and Peter Ullathorne has spoken to the person in charge from the Sir Josiah Mason Trust at Oak Tree House.

There are still three Friends in membership of Central England Area Meeting living at Oak Tree House. Sarah Jones and Anne Giles (both former Oak Tree House Trustees) are still in contact with them and continue to go in to bank holiday tea parties and Meeting for Worship at Oak Tree House.

We send this minute to the Area Meeting clerks for consideration.

A question was asked about the feelings of the current three Friends. They accept the suggested change, and very much value offers of friendship, and would welcome anyone joining their weekly Meeting for Worship at 6.00pm on Wednesdays.

2025/117: Social Media Policy – responses from Local Meetings and Outreach and Communications Committee

At our June Area Meeting we asked Local Meetings to consider the draft Social Media Policy. We have now received minutes from nine of our Local Meetings, and a minute from Outreach and Communications Committee. These minutes generally are positive about the policy as circulated, but there are several suggestions to improve and clarify particular points. These include more clarification and separation of official use (role holders, staff) and personal use of social media; what is meant by 'political neutrality'; how might compliance be monitored? We note that one LM (COV) felt unable to discern a response. The minute from Outreach and Communications committee suggests changing 'political neutrality' to 'party political neutrality'.

We agreed to send the policy and all the LM responses back to Trustees and Elders and Pastoral Friends support Group for further editing. The LMs that have not yet responded are encouraged to do so. The Charity commission requires CEQ to have a Social Media Policy, and it will apply to us all!

2025/118: Local Development Worker Report

We have received a report from our local development worker Hilary Topp. She sees her job as being responsive to requests for support and identifying priority areas where time and energy might be needed. She runs regular Role Holder Peer Support Sessions online and is very involved with children, young people and families, helping to plan the much enjoyed Families Weekend in February 2025 and the next one in November 2025.

There is now a monthly Young Adult Friends Group and she is part of the newly formed Outreach and Communications Committee. She supports Meetings with finding new ways of filling roles, a chance to have Spiritual Friendship Groups, and ways to offer pastoral support, in CEQ and other Area Meetings.

In BYM she is on the Quaker Life staff Team Time Together group, is involved with the Supporting Quaker Communities project and is a newly elected Union Rep.

We thank Hilary for her report and all her hard work on our behalf.

2025/119: Minutes from Local Meetings

We have received the following minutes from Local Meetings, recording the arrest or trial date of Friends acting under concern. Information about the Meeting for Sufferings Court and Prison Register was included in the papers for this Area Meeting.

Minute from Solihull Local Meeting

During our Meeting for Business on Sunday, it was recorded that Louise Scrivens, a Friend from Solihull Meeting, was arrested during a Defend Our Juries "Lift the Ban" action on 6th September 2025.

Stourbridge Local Meeting Minute 113/25 Witness for Palestine.

Henry Beakbane, a member of Stourbridge Local Meeting was arrested in London on 6th September 2025 and we ask for his name to be forwarded to Central England Quakers office and thereafter to Friends House.

Selly Oak Local Meeting 2025/60 Record of Arrest

We record the arrest of our friend Rajan Naidu on 4th October 2025 in Trafalgar Square supporting 'wedonotcomply.com'. He was arrested and taken to a holding facility, and then released on bail. Rajan says he was grateful for the volunteer police station support he received. We send this minute to Area Meeting

Selly Oak Local Meeting 2025/61 Trial of Rajan Naidu

We note that Rajan Naidu will be on trial on October 20th at Salisbury crown court for 2 weeks as a result of his action at Stonehenge raising awareness of the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty.

We have considered what action we need to take as an Area Meeting on the matter of Friends acting under concern. We feel what is needed in the first instance is for the AM clerks to consult Meeting for Sufferings clerks to ensure we proceed in accordance with Quaker process. We will return to this matter at a future Area Meeting.

If the AM clerks are satisfied after discussion with Meeting for Sufferings clerks that the minutes from our Local meetings fulfil the guidance, then they will be sent for inclusion on the Court and Prison Register.

2025/120: Thanks and next meeting

We thank Bournville Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, 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 10.30 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

Cathy Khurana, Paula Button
Co - clerks