

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bull Street Meeting House and online on 22nd November 2025

Clerk: Rae Ritchie Assistant Clerk: Paula Button
Elders: Stephen Petter and Mina Tilt
Pastoral Friend: Wendy Burnett

2025.121: Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard from Quaker Faith and Practice 24:53:

It should be the goal of understanding to pierce first through the thin layer of superficial familiarity and then through the hard rock of differing customs, habits and beliefs to discover the real humanity that lies beneath. National, racial and religious differences have not destroyed our common humanity, but they have given it different faces which may tempt us to forget that all the things that really matter, life and death, birth and love, joy and sorrow, poetry and prayer, are common to us all. The sense of our common humanity is latent within us, but only occasionally do we appreciate it as a living reality, as when at times of great stress we are upheld by strangers of an alien creed and tongue. Then the inward eye is opened and we see humanity standing above all nations, more humble, more patient and far more enduring than all the kingdoms of this earth. This is the ultimate justification for our peace-making.

J Duncan Wood, 1962

2025.122: 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: Louise Scrivens (SOL), Becky Shirley (SUT), Pete Doubtfire (BUL) and Mary Mather (WAL).

2025.123: Peacemakers Report

We are very pleased to have received the Annual Report and Accounts 2024 from Peacemakers. It has been a very successful year for them. They have made a dramatic and positive impact on the children, teachers and other staff in many of the schools they have visited, teaching valuable skills for life in problem solving, dealing with conflict and resolving disputes peacefully.

We have also heard from the outgoing director of Peacemakers, Sara Hagel, who reflected on her 17 years leading the project. While much has changed during that time, the positive impact on children and schools throughout the area has remained a constant. The short video clip that Sara shared, featuring two senior leaders from a school in Birmingham, reinforced the positive effects that this work has.

We then heard from Simon Best, clerk of the Peacemakers management committee. He explained that the external funding that the project has received for the year ahead is not as great as they had hoped. As a result, the move towards independent charity status and working on a national scale is on pause, as is recruitment of a new director. Friends, and staff working for Peacemakers, are reassured, however, that the existing level of work can continue as before. Simon and the management committee will continue to work with CEQ Trustees and Principal Officer, Sarah Barker, to navigate a way forward.

We uphold the Management Committee and the Peacemakers staff during this time of transition. We also thank Peacemakers for their full and inspiring report. We particularly thank Sara Hagel, Director, for everything she has done in guiding Peacemakers to the success they have achieved and wish her all the very best for the future.

2025.124: Trustee Matters

- a) *Completion of legal transfer of land related to the former Friends Meeting House, Redditch*
Trustees confirm that the legal transfer of the small strip of land on Oxhill Close, Redditch, to New Outlook Housing Association (linked but separate to the sale of the Meeting House) was completed on 18th August 2025. This now concludes all the interests of CEQ in the former Friends Meeting House in Redditch.
- b) *Quinquennial inspections: the next steps*
Quinquennial inspections of our Area Meeting properties are now mostly completed. The reports are very comprehensive and if all the recommendations were acted upon, we would be looking at a bill of around one million pounds over the next five years. In practice not all the work may need to be done, or it could be spread over a longer time-period. Also, the costs may be lower if local contractors are used. What needs to happen next is for Local Meeting Premises Committees to review the recommendations in the reports and decide what needs to be done. Trustees will then review all of this and hope to develop a five-year cost forecast for all the buildings.
- c) *Renewal of lease for Selly Oak Meeting House from Bournville Village Trust*
Trustees have received renewal terms for the lease of Selly Oak Meeting House from Bournville Village Trust. The legal paperwork is being processed and will ensure that Selly Oak Local Meeting can also continue to sublet the bungalow.
- d) *Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting transfer project*
Work continues with the transfer of the Meetings and assets of Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting to neighbouring Area Meetings. This is a complicated process, and everyone is trying to ensure that we end up with a solution that is sustainable in the long term. There are some difficult conversations, and we move forward in faith that a way will open.
- e) *Children, Youth and Families Worker*
There has been good progress towards the appointment of the Children, Youth and Families Worker by the small group led by the clerks. Conversations with Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), who will be responsible for managing the worker, have been very productive. BYM have advised Trustees that we commit to three years of funding rather than the two years that we agreed at a previous Area Meeting. We agree to commit to funding for this role for three years. Area Meeting will underpin the cost of this additional year, but we ask Local Meetings to also consider extending their commitment to this vital work from two years to three.
- f) *Northfield Meeting House: possibilities for the future*
While Trustees have a responsibility to ensure good stewardship of our property and finances, they do not have the authority to enter into agreements to sell or lease property for ten years or more without the Area Meeting giving their permission. Trustees are considering what the longer-term options may be for Northfield Meeting House in the same way as has been done recently for Edgbaston and Redditch meeting houses. The Area Meeting supports the Trustees to explore the opportunities available in terms of a longer term lease of Northfield Meeting House and we trust their discernment on this matter. We look forward to hearing more about this as and when decisions are required.

2025.125: Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM) Report

Becky Shirley has given us her report of her experience of the recent Young Friends General Meeting 2025. She spoke about the new ways of belonging report, which young friends are very interested in as a new approach to non-geographic membership, but noted that there are complications in going in this new direction that need to be resolved.

We have also received a copy of their minute which contains a concern regarding the acceptance of trans and non-binary people in some Quaker spaces and possible experiences of transphobia. It includes a call for YFGM to call for trans and non-binary inclusion within the Religious Society of Friends. It will call for more time and discernment and resources to form this and share with the wider Quaker community. We heard about the difficulty of both providing a safe space for those we welcome into our communities and challenging those who provide a barrier to inclusivity. These are big issues that speak to wider challenges in the Society of Friends and society more broadly. We hope to return to this issue during an Area Meeting workshop in 2026.

We thank Becky for her report.

2025.126: CEQ Annual Accounts 2024

The Trustees' annual report and accounts for the year ending 31st December 2024 were approved and signed by Trustees at their meeting in August and lodged with the Charity Commission shortly afterwards. These are a public document and have been audited by BSN Associates, Chartered Accountants. The accounts are those for the whole charity with the Priory Rooms Ltd as its trading company. The Trustees' report contains an overview of all the work that our Area Meeting does, including all the Local Meetings and the branches, and can be used for outreach.

The charity had an overall deficit of £58,000 in 2024, compared to a deficit of £16,000 in 2023, before revaluation gains that mainly relate to investment property (warden's accommodation now being rented out). We rely heavily on investment income from inherited assets to cover all the costs of running a fairly large charity in the regulatory environment of 2025. We are thankful for this and for the office staff and services that it enables us to have.

We need to increase our overall giving if we want to continue doing what we do. Our overall charitable activities cost just over £1 million last year – we are a busy Area Meeting with activity at Local Meeting and Area Meeting levels. We encourage all Friends and attenders in our Local Meetings to review their giving to Local Meeting, Area Meeting and to Yearly Meeting.

2025.127: CEQ Budget 2026

Area Meeting Treasurer Anne Ullathorne has presented the General Fund budget for 2026 to us. This covers Area Meeting activity, but not Local Meeting activity, which is also important. Our activities are organised into two areas: Faith in the Community, focused on sustaining and building the faith, allocated £55,000, and Faith in Action, focused on our witness in the world, allocated £40,000.

Based on these figures, we can see that local friends and Meetings contribute approximately £30,000 to a budget totalling almost £100,000. The shortfall will be met by Trustees using some investment funds, but in the long term this situation is not sustainable. Once again, we encourage all Friends and attenders in our Local Meetings to review their giving to Local Meeting, Area Meeting and to Yearly Meeting.

2025.128: Quaker Earthcare Gathering Epistle and Report

We have received an Epistle agreed as a minute from the Earthcare Gathering, organised by an umbrella group of Quaker bodies concerned about climate change, held at the Hayes Conference Centre, Derbyshire in October, as well as a considered description of the event by Louise Scrivens. Louise talked about some of the issues raised over the event, including the cost of attending, which can be prohibitive, even if bursaries are available, and the possibility of a BYM property strategy for retrofitting our Meeting Houses to better meet the demands of adapting to climate change.

Friends of all ages from Britain and Continental Europe gathered to explore how our Quaker faith and communities can help us to meet the Earth Crisis with hope, strength and compassion. Their time together was deeply rooted in worship and included a children's programme, a Quaker Quest session, workshops, discussions, practical activities, music, art and much more. The extended gathering will continue to the end of 2025 and beyond with online sessions and networks open to all friends everywhere. As the epistle notes, "We are nourished by deep rooted corporate testimony on the Earth by Yearly Meeting commitments of many years and the work of successive committees and groups."

Louise asked for Friends to share the epistle with their Local Meetings. We thank Louise for her report.

2025.129: Reflections on the Morning Workshop

This morning around 45 Friends gathered here at Bull Street Meeting House for an Area Meeting workshop entitled "love your neighbour: community, conflict and division." We began with a period of worship sharing during which we reflected on what we were bringing to the session. We then heard from eight speakers, all of whom belong to CEQ, about their experience of these topics and

involvement in responses to them. An energetic small group discussion followed, before a final period of worship. We thank the speakers for their time and insights and for flagging up future events and other resources that may be of interest. These are signposted in the workshop handout and many will appear on the CEQ newsfeed too. During their 2026 planning meeting, the Area Meeting clerks will also consider how to take this matter forward, including how to offer support to individual friends already engaged in this work on our behalf.

2025.130: Quaker Prison Chaplains Conference Report

Patricia Bradbury and Howard Saunders have offered us a report on the Quaker Prison Chaplains' Conference, which this year concentrated on the importance of nurturing one's spiritual side and creating a space for refreshment and retreat. Howard shared how the venue itself nurtured him spiritually and how his small group at the conference inspired him to introduce a new quiet hour initiative in the prison where he volunteers, which has now begun. He also shared how the core of prison chaplaincy is often being there for someone, which is in itself an expression of love.

We thank Patricia and Howard for their report.

2025.131: Membership Matters

TRANSFER OUT:

- The transfer out of Stuart Gallagher from Central England Area Meeting to Worcestershire and Shropshire Area Meeting has been accepted by Worcestershire and Shropshire Area Meeting.

INTERNAL TRANSFER

- Nicola Peterson from Cotteridge Local Meeting to Kings Heath Local Meeting.

2025.132: Nominations

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE SUGGESTS:

- Frances Rutter (WAR) to serve as an Area Meeting Trustee from November 2025 to October 2028
- John Kimberley (BUL) to serve as an Area Meeting Trustee from January 2026 to December 2028
- Heather Rowlands (COT) to serve as Registering Officer for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028
- Kate White (BOU) to serve on the Susanna Cole Trust for a further triennium from February 2026 to January 2028
- Vic Grainger (BOU) to serve as an Area Meeting Nominations Committee co-clerk for a second triennium from February 2026 to January 2028

BOURNVILLE LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

- Eli Conner-Maling (BOU) to serve on Area Meeting Nominations Committee for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028
- Anne Giles (BOU) to serve as an alternate on Area Meeting Nominations Committee for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028
- Nicholas Tulley (BOU) to serve as an Elder for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028
- Rhiannon Grant (BOU) to serve as an Elder for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028
- Howard Saunders (BOU) to serve as a Pastoral Friend for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028
- Vic Grainger (BOU) to serve as a Pastoral Friend for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028

SELLY OAK LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

- Rajan Naidu (SEL), Barnaby Waters (SEL) and Pat Wood (SEL) to serve as elders for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028

These names being acceptable, we appoint our Friends accordingly.

RELEASE FROM SERVICE

- Sarah Thompson (WAR) as an elder

We thank our Friend for their service.

2025.133: Priory Rooms Directors Report

We have received the report for the year from 1st January to 31st December 2024 from the Priory Rooms. 2024 was another successful trading year allowing Priory Rooms to make a donation of £70,000 to CEQ whilst continuing to restore some of the reserves which had been used during the lockdown period.

We also heard some of the recent positive feedback from users of the Priory Rooms, including those involved in the Talking Friend who value being able to use the space and the support of the staff.

We thank all staff at the Priory Rooms for their hard work and help in continuing to make the Priory Rooms a success.

2025.134: Minutes from Local Meetings

We have received the following:

Warwick Local Meeting Minute 25/51 A Friend Acting Under Concern

The guidance from the Faith in Action newsletter from Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) on informing Meeting for Sufferings of a Friend's arrest was circulated with the agenda for this meeting.

Marion Doyen was arrested on 6th September 2025 in Parliament Square, London. She was arrested under Section 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000 for holding a sign reading "I oppose Genocide, I support Palestine Action".

Marion spoke to two Friends (an Elder and a Pastoral Friend) before the event. She has explained that she thought of raising her intention, to attend the demonstration, with the Meeting but was concerned about implicating the Meeting in her actions.

We support Marion in her actions and ask our Clerk to send this minute to the Clerks of CEQ Area Meeting and ask them to forward the minute to Meeting for Sufferings, if appropriate, once the additional guidance is received.

2025.135: Thanks and Next Meeting

We thank Bull Street Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today. We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, back here at Bull Street Meeting House on Saturday 24th January 2026 at 2pm, with lunch and an activities fayre highlighting the work of Central England Area Meeting committees and groups between 12-2pm.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Rae Ritchie and Paula Button, clerks this time