

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bull St Meeting House and online on 24th January 2026

Clerk: Cathy Khurana Assistant Clerk: Paula Button
Elders: Stephen Petter and John Cox-Woolven
Pastoral Friend: Wendy Burnett

2026.001: Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of **Violet Mary Malins** (BOU) died 28th of November 2025 age 96.

Helen Pullen (SUT) died 4th December 2021.

Enid Carpenter (STO) died 14th January 2026, age 93,

John Maynard (STO) died 21st January 2026, age 82,

Andrew Watts (WAR) died 4th December 2025

We also heard from Quaker Faith and Practice, Chapter 3, paragraph 02 General Counsel on Church Affairs:

In our meetings for worship we seek through the stillness to know God's will for ourselves and the gathered group. Our meetings for church affairs, in which we conduct our business, are also meetings for worship based on silence, and they carry the same expectation that God's guidance can be discerned if we are truly listening together and to each other, and are not blinkered by preconceived opinions. It is this belief that God's will can be recognized through the discipline of silent waiting which distinguishes our decision-making process from the secular idea of consensus. We have a common purpose in seeking God's will through waiting and listening, believing that every activity of life should be subject to divine guidance.

This does not mean that laughter and a sense of humour should be absent from our meetings for church affairs. It does mean that at all times there should be an inward recollection: out of this will spring a right dignity, flexible and free from pomp and formality. We meet together for common worship, for the pastoral care of our membership, for needful administration, for unhurried deliberation on matters of common concern, for testing personal concerns that are brought before us, and to get to know one another better in things that are eternal as in things that are temporal.

2026.002 Representatives

The following Local Meetings are represented:

BGR, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, HAL, KIN, SEL, SOL, STO, SUT, WAL and WAR.

The Clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today:

Jonathan Bowmer (WAR).

We also welcome Kam Bola from ecobirmingham.

2026.003 Memorial Minute for Barbara Groombridge

We have received a Memorial Minute for Barbara Groombridge (Walsall) which is printed in the AM papers and has been read to us.

We send this minute to Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group for further consideration.

2026.004 Ecobirmingham Report

Eco-Birmingham is now based in the Midlands Arts Centre with their new CEO Kam Bola, who has joined us today to speak to the report. They work in 31 wards across the city of Birmingham some of which are in the top 10% of the most deprived in the UK. To monitor their impact they use the One Planet Living framework which highlights the following principles: Health and Happiness, Land and Nature, Zero Waste, Local and Sustainable Food, Travel and Transport, Culture and Community, Zero Carbon Energy and Equity and Local Economy. They do this using a variety of workshops and other activities for families and people of all ages and in partnership with many other organisations. In the future they hope to work more closely with key Community groups and explore new partnerships with creative organisations across the city with their passionate team, dedicated volunteers and generous donors.

We thank Eco Birmingham very much for their full, lively and colourful report.

2026.005 Woodlands Management Committee

We have received a report from Woodlands Management Committee and Julia Furminger (clerk to the committee) has spoken to the report and answered questions.

We have heard that the Woodlands (Woodlands Quaker Home is a non-profit organisation providing accommodation and care for older people through housing and residential care) has an effective, reliable, competent and dedicated senior management team who support and manage the staff most effectively.

We have heard too of the issues and difficulties facing the Woodlands Management Committee:

- i) The workload has increased significantly over the years as new legislation and working practices have to be implemented;
- ii) Residents at the Woodlands are older and tend to have multiple health problems when they move into the home;
- iii) The current Trustees/Management Committee have served on this committee for several triennia;
- iv) To support the Woodlands a new board of trustees needs to be recruited, composed of people who have particular knowledge, skills and experience.

We have heard many contributions from Friends who have served on the Woodlands Committee over the years. The relationship between CEQ and Woodlands has been clarified for us: CEQ is the landlord and is paid a peppercorn rent for the property as Woodlands is a concern of CEQ, but Woodlands is a separate charity.

The Woodlands Management Committee/Trustees is responsible for strategy, but CEQ Nominations Committee is responsible for suggesting names for approval by the Management Committee. It is not necessary for all Trustees to be Quakers.

We ask Nominations committee to consider the matter of new Trustees for Woodlands Management Committee widely. It is important to recognise that we need trustees with financial, IT and admin skills, and knowledge of residential care.

Names of those willing to serve are sent to the Woodlands Management Committee for consideration, then to CEQ for appointment.

We ask everyone at Area Meeting today to share this minute with their Local Meeting and encourage friends to consider the possibility of offering their service.

2026.006 Meetings for Sufferings Report

Nicholas Paton Philip (STO) has sent a report of the Meeting for Sufferings held on the 6th of December 2025 (not 2026 as in the papers.) Condensed minutes are accessible on the Quakers in Britain website.

The minutes cover the following areas of concern.

Items 4-9 were accepted on draft minutes which covered Membership and Appointments, Prison and Court Register, Governance Developments in Scotland and Yorkshire, Area Meeting Annual Compliance Report and an update on the Memorandum of Understanding between Quaker charities

Then followed minutes concerning;

The Review of Process for Registration and Renewal of Quaker Recognised Bodies.

The Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) paper on Gender Diversity.

A Report from Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees.

The Book of Discipline Revision Committee Report (BDRC).

Quaker Recognised Bodies

Quaker Marriage Declaration

Changes to Quaker Faith and Practice

and Closing Worship

It should be noted that there was shock and concern expressed about the sentencing of Andrew Dames, Cambridge Area Meeting, who has just received a 26th month sentence for his part in the Just Stop Oil Action on the M25

Also, the application by the group 'Sex Matters to Quakers' to be a Quaker Recognised Body was not approved as the meeting was not in Unity.

The March meeting will be the last time that Meeting for Sufferings is convened once the new arrangement for the quarterly meetings of Yearly Meeting begins at the close of business of the BYM meeting in May 2026.

We thank Nicholas for his report.

2026.007 Trustee Matters

We have received this minute from Sandra Berry, clerk to CEQ trustees:

Update from CEAQM trustees on the Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting transfer project:

Minute recorded at BEAM event on 7th December 2025

On December 7th, Friends involved in the integration and transfer of Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting Friends met at Worcester Quaker Meeting House.

We spent time understanding this difficult process from each of our own perspectives; listening well, being realistic and focusing on things in common. There has been joy in this process and Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting (BEAM) Friends have felt supported by all those engaged in this work. We have shared positive stories of how Local Meetings have been supported to thrive again. We have shared frustrations that it may not be the kindest thing to delay a decision, and we have recognised that sitting in discomfort for a while longer may bring a better result.

We feel there would be value in widening this approach to thinking about how all our Area Meetings might support each other better, particularly for Friends who may feel sceptical or scared. This might include inviting other adjacent Area Meetings. Can we widen the support group for BEAM to consider how we jointly support each other as four Area Meetings? Can we encourage intervisitation?

We are a 'family' and we need to guard against the Charity Commission structure that might prevent us from seeing our fellow Meetings as our brothers and sisters. Can we move to a place where we say "Welcome" and then work out how we make it work?

We are reminded of the value of simplicity of purpose and we are trying to remove barriers to being a true worshipping community. We must always be open to change – to be open to new light.

Sandra Berry and John Crosfield, Clerks this time

Following this meeting a small group of Central England Quaker Area Meeting trustees met and considered a developing situation where Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting have said they are not comfortable with taking the three Local Meetings currently proposed to move to them from Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting. These three Local Meetings are Banbury, Sibford and Broad Campden. As an Area Meeting, BEAM's financial activity is very small. Most of the Meeting Houses are historic. Many of them do not generate income. Adding in one or two Local Meetings is very different to absorbing four or five and could fundamentally change the way CEQ Area Meeting can function. How do we manage to remain connected as a faith community with a much larger geographic spread? In summary, nothing has been formalised yet, but conversations are continuing.

Questions for Area Meeting:

- 1) How do we feel about the possibility of up to 5 Local Meetings from Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting joining us?
- 2) What would help us to manage this?
- 3) Do we feel Britain Yearly Meeting should be offering more leadership in this matter?

We have heard several ideas, many thoughts and feelings about being joined by up to five Local Meetings.

We have been reminded of the necessity for an Area Meeting to have a group of trustees, but we have also heard about new patterns of Quaker groupings particularly in Wales and Scotland.

We suggest that this matter needs more information, discernment and exploration, and ask CEQ Trustees and the Area Meeting Clerking Team to arrange an event for this to happen. We feel this needs to be a stand-alone event rather than an Area Meeting agenda item.

2026.008 Report on the Families Weekend 28th - 30th of November 2025

It was good to hear that a large group of Quaker children and their parents and carers met again at The Greenhouse in the Waseley Hills for their weekend away. The weather might have been a bit soggy, but hearts and minds were not. There was plenty of space for the young children to play as well as for the adults to chat and get to know each other.

Everyone enjoyed the performance of Dinosaurs and all that Rubbish by Michael Foreman written by Carol with songs by James Bradbury and facilitated by Lauren. The stomping dinosaurs and rocket launches were impressive as was the message about sharing our wonderful world with everyone.

Some comments from the children:-

"I loved doing all the crafts."

"The best thing was doing the play because I enjoyed having the opportunity to act."

"I loved the Den building and doing the dinosaur play."

We were delighted to welcome the children at today's party to share the photos of the Families Weekend and collect their hamper of party food.

2026.009 Update on SDSC Arms Fair, 3rd to the 4th of February, NEC, Birmingham.

Pete Doubtfire has provided this update for us and has spoken to the matter and answered questions.

In February the **Special Defence and Security Convention (SDSC-UK)** will be coming to the NEC near Birmingham. The fair left Telford following two years of protest, which Friends have supported in a variety of ways. An open letter calling for the fair to be cancelled, signed by over 400 individuals and 30 organisations, was delivered to the NEC on Wednesday 21 January. Several Friends joined, include some helping to operate the Peace Dove puppet. Friends are invited to join people of all faiths and none to walk a one-day peace pilgrimage from Birmingham city centre to the NEC on Saturday 31st January. Whilst the arms fair is taking place, two days of witness (led by the Stop SDSC coalition) aim to bring what is in hiding into visibility. Tuesday 3rd February will be focussed on engaging members of the public attending other activities at the NEC. It is hoped that Wednesday 4th February will include a silent vigil led by Quakers, alongside creative and reflective responses to the arms trade.

There is a WhatsApp Group for those interested. Contact Pete Doubtfire at Peace Hub for information.

2026.010 How the Truth has Prospered at Bull Street Local Meeting

We have received a report from Bull Street Local Meeting. It is a traditional Meeting strongly upholding the religious basis of Quakers and the political implications of our testimonies. Bible passages, Advices and Queries and Faith and Practice passages are often read during Meeting by most members and attenders. There have been a variety of talks, discussions, films and a study day as well as many social occasions during the year. Approximately 20 friends attend on a Sunday and they also hold a midweek meeting on Wednesdays.

We thank Bull Street for their report.

2026.011 Membership Matters

Deaths;

- Violet Mary Malins (BOU) died 28th of November 2025 age 96
- Helen Pullen (SUT) died 4 December 2021
- Enid Carpenter (STO) died 14th January 23 2026, age 93
- John Maynard (STO) died 21st January 2026, age 82
- Andrew Watts (WAR) died 4th December 2025.

Resignation:

Anne Christie (BGR) has resigned her membership of the Religious Society of Friends.

Internal transfer:

Liz Collinge-Hill from Cotteridge LM to Kings Heath LM.

Application for membership:

Christine Gunter (BGR). We ask Nominations committee to find the names of two Friends to visit Christine to explore her spiritual journey.

2026.012: Nominations**NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE SUGGESTS:**

Jonathan Bowmer (WAR, NIM) to serve on Outreach and Communications Committee for a triennium from January 2026 to December 2028

Eleanor Nesbitt (COV) to serve on the Community Justice Group

Lucy (WAR), Charlotte (WAR), Rowan (SEL), Daniel (STO) and Natasha (WAR) to attend Junior Yearly Meeting 2026

Rosalie Rider (STO) and David Gough (KIN) to assist with completion of the tabular statement 2025.

Nominations from LMs for Elders and Pastoral Friends

John Kimberley (BUL) to serve as an Elder from January 2026 – December 2028

Lynn Morris (STO) to serve as a Pastoral Friend from January 2026 – December 2028.

These names being acceptable, our Friends are appointed accordingly.

Release from service

Rae Ritchie has requested release from service on AM/CYPC.

We thank Rae for her service and release her from the committee.

2026.013 Change of date of August Area Meeting

Our devotional Area Meeting at Barnt Green and Redditch Quaker Meeting House in August has a new date. It will be held on Saturday 22nd August, 2.0 – 3.0pm, with a walk and picnic in the Lickey Hills in the morning. A revised AM schedule has been sent to Local Meetings.

2026.014 Minutes from Local Meetings

We have received the following minutes:

1. From Warwick LM

Minute 25/59 A Friend Acting Under Concern - Update: Further to our Minute 25/51. We have been informed, by Marion Doyen, that her Bail has been lifted and that she is “Released Under Investigation”. She understands that this change applies to all those arrested at the demonstration in Parliament Square on 6th September 2025. We ask our Clerk to send this minute to the Area Meeting Clerks.

2. Minute from Bournville Local Meeting 2026.05 Record of Arrest

We record the arrest of our friend Ralph Wallin on 29 November, 2024. He was arrested under Article 13 of the Terrorist Act; taken to Perry Barr Police Station where he was processed and charged and then released on bail. Along with others, he was holding a sign saying "I oppose Genocide. I support Palestine Action." This was part of a campaign led by "Defend Our Juries ". We will send this minute to Area Meeting.

2026.015 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Bull Street Quakers for hosting AM today.

The next CEQ Area Meeting will be held on Thursday 26th February 2026, at Sutton Coldfield Quaker Meeting House, with tea from 5.0pm and Area Meeting from 6.0 – 9.0pm.

Cathy Khurana and Paula Button

Co-clerks

The following items on the agenda were deferred for a future Area Meeting:

- Behaviour Policy – responses from Local Meetings;
- Prison and Court Register;
- Reflections on the Meeting for Learning Saturday 10th January;
- Reflections on the Activities Fayre.