

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Sutton Coldfield Meeting House and online on 26th February 2026

Clerk: Rae Ritchie Assistant Clerk: Paula Button
Elders: Cathy Khurana and John Cox-Woolven

2026.016: Worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of Jennifer Brooks (BOU), who died on 10th February 2026 aged 90.

We also heard from *Quaker Faith and Practice* 23:102:

We believe in overcoming evil with good. We must speak and act from our own inner light to the inner light in all others as Jesus did. He showed and taught love, respect and concern for all, particularly those rejected by others, reaching out to the good in them.

Causing deliberate hurt to another person because that suffering is thought to be of benefit in itself, we believe is not a Christian response. Punishment in this sense not only harms the punished but also degrades those who inflict it, and is a barrier to the working of God's love within us.

Whether it be in the family, the school, the workplace or the wider community the intentional use of pain and suffering cannot be the best way to resolve differences, or gain the cooperation of people or restrain those who harm themselves or others.

To do away with punishment is not to abandon safety and control or to move towards disintegration, disorder and lawlessness. A non-punitive approach will not remove the need in some circumstances for restraint or secure containment, but it does mean that restraint and containment should be carried out in a life-enhancing spirit of love and care.

Nor in general does this loving approach have lesser expectations or demand less responsibility than does the infliction and acceptance of punishment. In personal relationships and in the broader context of community and international affairs a positive response to aberrant or destructive behaviour through reconciliation, restitution and reparation may take longer but it will be more likely to encourage the good in all parties, restore those who are damaged, reduce resentment and bitterness, and enable all those involved to move towards fuller integration.

Six Quakers, 1979

2026.017 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: Ian Taylor (SUT)

2026.018 Tabular Statement Report

We have received the tabular statement for the year ending 31st December 2025, which records the number of members and attenders at Central England Area Meeting's Local Meetings and on the unattached list. We thank Helen Waters, Rosalie Rider and David Gough for their work in compiling this.

The numbers, as is so often the case, only tell part of the story. The number of children, for example, fell from 39 to 32, although as introduction to the tabular statement notes, there were also two successful families' weekends where nearly all of those children were present. Some meetings may have decreased in size over recent years but may now find themselves more buoyant and vibrant than before.

Those responsible for compiling the tabular statement are interested in how the numbers given for Local Meetings in the table compare to average attendance at Meeting for Worship. Our experience already tells us these figures may be very different from the list. We ask Local Meetings to record the actual attendance on the four Sundays in November and share this information alongside the tabular statement return for 2026. If the people undertaking this task are able to record how many different individuals attend Meeting over those weeks, that would also be very helpful.

2026.019 How the Truth has Prospered in Local Meetings

A booklet titled "How the Truth has prospered in the 14 Local Meetings within Central England Area Meeting during 2025" was circulated alongside the Area Meeting papers and additional copies are also available here this evening. Further copies are available upon request from the office.

As the front of the booklet states, 'The query "How has the Truth prospered amongst you since our last meeting?" has been used by Quakers since the 1680s. "Truth" here refers to the deep spiritual Truth that we seek as a community. It is a prompt to reflect on our inward spiritual practice and outward expression of our Testimonies.'

Every year, the Local Meetings within Central England Area Meeting are asked to respond to this query. These responses inform the Trustees annual report and, as elements of the document are available online, may be seen by the wider public too. The response from each Local Meeting is shared when they host Area Meeting, but seeing all the responses together in one place may reveal deeper insights into how the Truth is prospering among us all. It also provides an opportunity to learn more about Local Meetings other than our own, perhaps to inspire, perhaps to know one another more in the things that are eternal.

2026.020 How the Truth has Prospered at Sutton Coldfield Local Meeting

We have received a report from Sutton Coldfield Meeting.

Although quite a small meeting, attendance has remained quite steady. Filling necessary Quakers roles is a challenge - Social Committee activities have been passed to Elders/Pastoral Friends. A new garden path has been installed with help from members of the Meeting to make the garden more accessible to all. Various study groups have been held during the year with one on the Epistle of James planned for next year.

A sustainability group, "Making a difference group" for Quakers and non-Quakers, is held every month to discuss issues and also have crafting sessions. This group meets on the third Saturday of the month between 3pm and 6pm. All are welcome to join.

Banners were made for Quaker week for the Meeting House garden inspired by Quaker quotes and testimonies. Other activities include shared lunches and teas, occasional book groups and film nights providing a valued sense of community and fellowship.

We thank Sutton Coldfield for their report.

2026.021 Minutes from Local Meetings

We have received minutes from Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting and from the Barnt Green and Redditch Support Group. The support group was established in 2021 when numbers were dwindling in the Meeting. The Meeting holds the Support Group in deep gratitude for its faithful and sustained work during which it has survived and grown.

Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting asks Area Meeting to agree to allow the support group to continue until the end of 2026. We agree to this request but also recognise that the words do little to convey the love and joy that accompanies this minute and those received from the Barnt Green and Redditch Meeting and its support group.

2026.022 Trustee Update

We have received an update from Sandra Berry, Clerks to Trustees, on the following matters:

- 1) The transfer project for Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting
 - a. Trustees have given further consideration to the transfer project for Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting (BEAM). If Area Meeting wishes to accept Ettington and Stratford Upon Avon Local Meetings, Trustees will support the process of legal transfer as soon as BEAM think it can begin. The feeling of the meeting is that we would like to proceed with this acceptance, and we look forward to welcoming both Ettington and Stratford Upon Avon Local Meetings to Central England Quakers.
 - b. Trustees would recommend the acceptance of the investment property, the former Meeting House at Shipston, if this is offered by BEAM.
 - c. Trustees will support the Area Meeting process for discerning the situation with the other meetings in BEAM, namely Banbury, Sibford and Broad Campden LMs. To this end, there will be a workshop to explore "Ways of Being an Area Meeting: Reflecting on the Issues Arising from the Laying Down of Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting" on Saturday 7th March at Priory Rooms open to all Central England Quakers.
- 2) The draft social media policy
 - a. Trustees were heartened by the level of response from Local Meetings to the draft social media policy.

- b. Trustees have agreed to the suggestion from Area Meeting Elders and Pastoral Friends' Support Group that they work together with them on updates to the policy.
- c. Trustees will bring a revised social media policy to a future Area Meeting.

3) Updates to employment policies

Trustees have approved minor updates to four employment policies (time off in lieu, hybrid working, appraisal and performance management, equalities) to comply with recent changes in legislation.

4) Annual Area Meeting/Charity return to Quakers in Britain

The annual Area Meeting/Charity return to Quakers in Britain was submitted on 22 January 2026. This relates to questions around charity compliance and governance including the number of Local Meetings registered with the EcoChurch scheme.

5) Area Meeting Safeguarding Team annual report

Trustees have received the annual safeguarding report from the Area Meeting Safeguarding Team and encourage all Local Meetings to complete their safeguarding returns if they have not already done so.

6) Woodlands Quaker Home

Trustees have noted that Woodlands Quaker Home governing document gives the option to co-opt trustees/directors themselves for a maximum of one year.

2026.023 Quaker Christmas Parcels Report and Accounts

This annual activity has now been running for 62 years. 840 parcels were packed this year, 85% of these going to the probation service for the families of prisoners and those in great need, the remaining 15% to groups working with refugees and asylum seekers where Quakers play an important role.

While there were some issues with the food order, fundraising went well again this year with many generous individual donations, donations from trusts and donations from some Meetings which held special Christmas Parcel fundraising events. New plastic bags were used this year, not only stronger but also printed with the words 'Quaker Concern at Christmas'. This was appreciated by everybody.

Special thanks are due to all our volunteers, to the probation service and to the Area Meeting office which produces the appeal letters and prints the labels. This is a joyful annual event which generates much goodwill among all those taking part not just with the packing but also those in the receiving groups who then deliver the parcels. This was experienced as deeply rewarding by everyone concerned and we encourage anyone able to help with the packing to do so as it is always an uplifting occasion.

We thank the Quaker Christmas Parcels committee for their report.

2026.024 Update on the SDSC Arms Fair

We have received a report from The Peace Hub regarding the SDSC [Specialist Defence and Security Convention] Arms Fair on the 3rd-4th February at the NEC, Birmingham. Campaigners and activities included a silent Quaker vigil, Christian led prayers, drumming, street theatre from the Red Rebels and a mock drone attack 'die-in' with testimonies of people affected by drones and air strikes being read out.

These all helped to bring the arms fair into visibility to other groups attending events at the NEC who were totally unaware of it happening until leafleteers at the railway station informed them of the situation. This shows that the venue is wary of the negative associations around hosting the arms trade and were trying to keep this quiet. Members of the Stop SDSC coalition are now reflecting on what has been learned and how to continue and details will be shared with Friends when available.

Friends can also write to the CEO of the NEC Group, Paul Reeve asking them to stop hosting the arms fair - postcards are available from the Peace hub -or there is a letter and an email template available on the StopSDSC website (www.stop-sdsc.uk/).

We thank Pete Doubtfire for his report.

2026.025 Memorial Minute as Testimony

We support with the following minute from the Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group.

2026.01 Testimony to the Grace of God in the life of Dorothy Sheila Parry

We recommend that the memorial minute of Dorothy Sheila Parry should be considered as a testimony, with no alteration.

Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of Dorothy Sheila Parry

12/04/1930 - 13/03/2025

Dorothy was a member of Central England Meeting and a much loved friend at Warwick Local Meeting.

Dorothy was brought up in Coventry and after grammar school she attended Royal Holloway College, graduating in history. She became a history teacher and married a fellow teacher, Roy Parry, in 1970. Sadly Roy developed cancer and died after only 4 years of marriage. During the time of her marriage Dorothy re-trained as a librarian and spent the rest of her working life in that occupation.

Dorothy was devastated by Roy's death and used to spend time sitting quietly in the garden of the Warwick Meeting House. After discussing Quakerism with a respected colleague, she decided to find out who and what was inside the building. She joined the Society of Friends in the early 1990s and became an elder in 1994 and after that an overseer, assistant clerk, then became clerk in 2000. With another friend she organised regular study groups. Also she was involved with Churches Together in Warwick and represented Quakers in the local Multi Faith forum.

She researched the history of Warwick Meeting House, building up an excellent collection of documents covering the history of our Meeting and Meeting House since 1671 including George Fox's visits to Warwick. This archive is now on our website.

During the 1990s Warwick Meeting had a project to extend the premises and build and run a community cafe for the people of the town, as at that time there were few places where people could meet. Dorothy was very involved in setting up and running the café and served on the café committee until 2013. She would tell stories about its early days and always said it was the best thing Warwick Meeting had done.

Dorothy really cared about others and helped, influenced and had an impact on many, many people, both at Meeting and locally in Warwick. She loved children and was always interested in their welfare and helped wherever she could, right up until her death. When newcomers came to Meeting, she would talk to them and was always friendly and interested in what they had to say. She was open minded about spirituality so was able to relate to non theists as well as more traditional believers. She was empathetic and sensitive to people's needs, well-read and intelligent, and loved classical music. She had strongly held views on a variety of subjects, especially regarding social justice and politics, and had a great sense of humour and fun, so if you went to see Dorothy you always came away uplifted. Despite the sadness in her life, she "walked cheerfully over the world, answering that of god in every one".

Throughout her life Dorothy was a role model, kind and generous with her time and her possessions. When her health failed and she had to move to a care home she wanted her belongings to go to whoever would appreciate them and asked for nothing in return. She befriended the staff at the home and was loved by them. By the end of her life, she had no living relatives and Quakers were her family. But she was family to the Meeting too, well-loved and a pattern and example to us all.

Ann James, Marilyn Biles
Warwick Meeting

2026.026 Membership Matters

a) Deaths

Jennifer Brooks (BOU) died 10th February 2026 aged 90

b) Resignation:

Adam Bell (COT)

c) Application for membership

Jonathan Bowmer (WAR)
Eleanor Rushton (BOU)

We ask Nominations committee to find the names of two Friends to visit each of them.

2026.027 Notification of Marriage

We have received notification of the planned marriage between Olufunmilayo (Funmi) Jinadu and Chad Perkins (BGR), both of 24 Dearmont Road, Longbridge, due to take place at Bull Street Meeting House on Saturday 15th August 2026 at 1pm.

2026.028 Nominations

a) NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE SUGGESTS:

- Lesley Morgan (BGR) and Stephen Petter (BUL) as visitors to Christine Gunter (BGR) on her journey into membership
- Marc Pearson (SEL, attender) to serve on Children and Young People's Committee for a triennium from March 2026 to February 2029
- William Waddilove (COV) to serve on Quaker Christmas Parcels committee for a triennium from March 2026 to February 2029
- Howard Saunders (BOU) to serve for a further year of Quaker Christmas Parcels committee from April 2026 to March 2027
- Alison Ironside (SEL) to serve on Trustees Records Advisory Committee for a triennium from March 2026 to February 2029
- Leah Roberts (HAR, attender) to serve on Outreach and Communications Committee for a triennium from March 2026 to February 2029
- Sally Kaminsky-Gaze (BOU) to serve on Peacemakers Management Committee for another triennium from March 2026 to February 2029
- Carole Pannell (STO) to continue to serve as a safeguarding coordinator until September 2027 and in this role to continue to serve on Children and Young People's Committee also until September 2027
- James Bradbury (STO) to serve for a further year on Peace Hub Management Committee from April 2026 to March 2027
- Mina Tilt (HAL) to serve as a trustee of Workcare West Midlands representing Central England Quakers

These names being acceptable, we appoint our Friends accordingly.

b) BARNT GREEN AND REDDITCH LOCAL MEETING SUGGESTS:

- Chad Perkins (BGR) to serve as an alternate on Area Meeting nominations committee from February 2026 to December 2026

This name being acceptable, we appoint our Friend accordingly.

c) WOODLANDS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (FOR INFORMATION)

- Peter Collard (NIM), Marilyn Coulter (NIM), Julia Furminger (STO) and Nicholas Paton Philip (STO) have been coopted by the committee for 12 months to the end of February 2027.

d) CORRECTION

- At November Area Meeting minute 2025.132 Kate White (BOU) was appointed to serve on the Susanna Cole and Others trust for a triennium from February 2026 to January 2028. This should have read from February 2026 until January 2029.

2026.029 Prison and Court Register

Given the lack of clarity surrounding the process regarding Minutes from Local Meetings and the Meeting for Sufferings Prison and Court Register at Area Meeting in October, the Area Meeting co-clerks and Area Meeting Administrator met with Sarah Donaldson, Senior Change Leader in Quaker Governance at Britain Yearly Meeting, to clarify procedure and responsibilities.

Local Meetings need to be aware that:

- 1) Meeting for Sufferings only records court appearances and outcomes, for example, if a Friend is sentenced or found not guilty. Meeting for Sufferings does not record arrests.
- 2) The decision to send information for inclusion is a choice, not a necessity. No Friend is compelled to register.
- 3) Responsibility for testing the concern that led to charges lies with individual Friends and their Local Meetings.
- 4) Meeting for Sufferings asks for specific information, not a minute, from the Friend's Local Meeting, not their Area Meeting. This information must include:
 - The name of the Friend
 - The charge(s) and date of the charge
 - Date of court appearance
 - Outcome
- 5) The Friend must be happy with this information going into the public domain.

The Local Meetings that submitted minutes for the October Area Meeting should look at those minutes again and take any necessary steps in light of this new guidance.

In future, Local Meetings are still welcome to minute the arrest of Friends acting under concern and, with their consent, share these with Area Meeting so that the individual can be upheld.

The Area Meeting Clerks will go back to Sarah Donaldson to confirm where information should be sent once Meeting for Sufferings is laid down.

2026.030 Behaviour Policy – Responses from Local Meetings

While the responses from Local Meetings about the behaviour policy express a wide range of differing views, a clearer way forward on how to handle difficult behaviour within our Meetings has begun to emerge. We also understand that further discernment will take time.

Friends would welcome more training on how to handle the situations we face that we may struggle with. Friends would also welcome an opportunity to explore the issue in more detail, perhaps in the form of a threshing meeting. Most of all, Friends would welcome guidance that feels more in alignment with the Quaker ethos and principles as laid out in *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

We ask the Area Meeting Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group to consider this matter. We ask them to come back to us at a future Area Meeting with suggestions as to possible next steps, of which there may be several.

2026.031 Reflections on the Meeting for Learning Saturday 10th January

The weather was rather unhelpful on the day for this fascinating talk about “Building the successful society: how Quakers evolved to thrive” from Andrew Fincham from Ettington Local Meeting, although attendance was still very good. Twenty people attended in person and around 20 people online, including Friends from other Area Meetings.

Andrew talked initially about the early history of Protestantism in England and the development of various groups including Quakers. During his study, he came to recognise that there were four key strengths which helped Quakers thrive: Education for Life, Shared Opportunities, Shared Finances, and Shared Values. Quakers helped and supported each other in all these ways. Employment among Quakers moved from the level of labourers, servants and small holders to skilled craft people, to commerce, especially food production, and finally finance. Early Quakers were initially very open and accepting of a general spirituality with nothing written down until 1737, and The Book of Discipline was initially very practical. This later became tighter and stricter and inward looking with more discipline. However, interestingly there was no membership until the 1800s.

Andrew was a very good speaker, and his talk was much enjoyed with many questions and much feedback arising from it. Everyone was glad they had attended and would recommend it to other Quaker groups and Local and Area Meetings.

We thank Andrew for his interesting talk and James Bradbury for organising this popular event.

2026.032 Reflections on the Activities Fayre

Before our Area Meeting for Business on 24th January 2026, an Activities Fayre was held to give Friends an opportunity to hear more about the work of the many concerns and activities of Central England Quakers. The following groups all had a space:

- Area Meeting Clerks
- Trustees
- Nominations
- Ecumenical and Interfaith
- The Talking Friend
- Coventry Migrant Women’s House
- The Woodlands
- Community Justice Group
- Quaker Christmas Parcels
- Peacemakers
- Responding to Racism

- The Peace Hub
- The Asylum Group
- Outreach and Communication Committee
- Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group
- Climate Emergency Action

Some tables were busy throughout the event, whereas others had far fewer enquiries, with those focusing on Quaker witness among the former and those focusing on Quaker roles among the latter. Those that were busy welcomed the opportunity to share more about their work in an informal setting. Even those that were not busy report enjoying the event.

There is also a challenge with the amount of space available, which is why Area Meeting Clerks have so far kept the focus on Central England Quaker concerns. The Clerks will consider what has been said about this year and how that may shape any future such events.

We thank all the groups, committees and individuals involved in sharing their areas of work and concern.

2026.033 Children, Youth and Family Development Worker Update

The steering group appointed by Area Meeting last July have been working with Kirsty Philbrick of Quakers in Britain and as part of the process approached three neighbouring Area Meetings (Gloucester, Worcestershire and Shropshire, Leicester) to see if they wanted to join this initiative and fund the worker for additional hours to cover their region. These Area Meetings have until April for discernment, although we have already heard that Gloucestershire will not be pursuing this opportunity.

The steering group will return to Area Meeting with further updates once they have more to share.

2026.034 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Sutton Coldfield for their warm welcome and hospitality today.

The next Central England Quaker Area Meeting will be held, should nothing occur to prevent, on Saturday 28th March at 2pm at Bournville Quaker Meeting House, with lunch from 1pm and a workshop between 10.45am-12.45pm. The workshop, facilitated by our Friend and Woodbrooke tutor Stuart Masters, is entitled The Shape of Quaker Spirituality.

Signed on behalf of Central England Quakers

Rae Ritchie and Paula Button

Clerks this time