

REPORT: Meeting For Sufferings Residential, 3 – 5 October 2025.

PAPER A

Elaine Millar: GM/ Quakers in Scotland and West Scotland Area Meeting Representative.

Please refer to the Quakers in Britain website, [Meeting for Sufferings papers and minutes | Quakers in Britain](#). Note also the annual review, annual report and financial statements which were spoken to by BYM trustees [Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees | Quakers in Britain](#).

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) residential happens every two years and is special, not least to me because at the previous one, during Sunday breakfast I was tucked in a corner on the phone, and afterwards a Friend asked, “Were you just talking someone through her contractions?” Yes! I was! And my darling granddaughter Maisy was born a few hours later, the news arriving as I journeyed home. But I digress!

As storm Amy threatened, Friends from all corners arrived at High Leigh conference centre in Hertfordshire, and, as always, dived almost immediately into business. Significantly, throughout the weekend, all the prepared readings from Quaker Faith & Practice and elsewhere were about listening to each other and opening to the Light.

It was not the first item on the agenda but is likely a headline many Scottish Friends will look for, that Meeting for Sufferings accepted the laying down of East Scotland, North Scotland and West Scotland Area Meetings, and uphold Friends, “as they develop new structures that aim to help Quakerism in Scotland to thrive”. They request that Quakers in Scotland (QiS) send four representatives to serve at each Yearly Meeting (YM) as it moves to become continuing YM - where alternates are no longer required to be nominated because all Friends may attend, and in the event of a rep being prevented, alternate representation may be organised within QiS. (See papers, pages 22 & 23; minutes, pages 7 & 8).

Alongside our usual MfS business - dealing with Quaker Recognised Bodies and updating the Court and Prison Record, as well as receiving reports - there were three main themes for our consideration and discernment:

1. The ‘theological and community aspects of online and blended worship’.
2. The ‘faithful relation of church and state’, referring to the loyal address to the king.
3. ‘Faith, inclusion and growth’, an exploration of our strategic priorities into the 2030s.

For our first theme Simonne Wood, a Woodbrooke staff member, and Paul Hodgkin, a YM elder gave us their reflections. As they spoke, I came to realise my thinking on the matter has become polarised:

- on the one hand, there is wonder at the connectedness technology offers, over-riding geographical distance, enabling inclusion for those with disabilities or other responsibilities, as well as reducing costs on the wallet and the planet.
- on the other hand, there is frustration at the fallibility of said tech, a difficulty finding Friends confident to work it, and the challenge of tuning in to a true gatheredness between those physically in the meeting room and those in attendance online.

For the first time I was encouraged to think of blended meetings for worship in the context of history. Just as Friends nearly 400 years ago perhaps baulked at, or embraced the novel notion of purpose-built meeting houses, rather than glorious (exposed) hills and the (draughty) shelter

of barns, so we are similarly placed at *the very beginning* of a major change in our history. Five years ago, Zoom was simply a sound effect for a rocket but look at us now! Therefore, give it time; faithfully apply the discipline of our Quaker processes such that all may listen and be heard; network with Quakers here and across the world to find out what might work best; be open to a different experience of gatheredness; keep working at it.
(See papers, pages 10-14; minutes, page 10).

Our second theme concerned the controversy among Friends surrounding the 'loyal address' to the monarch - in March 2023, to King Charles III. Young Friends General Meeting acting on principle declined the invitation to be involved, but a delegation of Quakers accepted. Stuart Masters, a Woodbrooke Associate Tutor offered a carefully researched and fascinating historical and theological context against which to consider our position. In worship our ministry questioned whether the exercising of this privilege is counter to our testimony to equality, and aligns us with state rather than divine rule, but balanced against this was the recognition of an opportunity to speak truth to power - not that the king has power as such, but he does meet with influential people, including weekly with the prime minister. In 2023 the address was used to speak of the damage and futility of all wars, the climate crisis, transgender inclusion and reparations for the transatlantic slave trade: we heard that the king himself afterwards remarked that the Quaker delegation was the one with something different to say. Our minute states, "We hope that in retaining this privilege, we will use it boldly."
(See papers, pages 53-64; minutes, page 10).

Our final theme used the 'Radical Hearts, Open Minds' workshop format, led by Rachel Matthews from Quaker Life. We were challenged to be creative in imagining how our Quaker communities in Britain will look and act ten years hence. Different activities were offered, some groups working on a local meeting newsletter, another writing minutes for a hypothetical future Area meeting business meeting, there was a visual allotment of the things which Quaker communities currently do which help them to thrive. One group included Lego building – perhaps a strange choice for a blended meeting, and yet it provided an opportunity to literally model thoughts, where a 'mystery box', not yet opened was a fun and somehow optimistic inclusion! Similar workshop sessions have taken place across Britain this autumn, including in Edinburgh on October 25, and there is still an online only session to come on 22 November - see [Radical Hearts, Open Minds | Quakers in Britain](#).
(See papers, pages 32 - 39; minutes, pages 10 & 11).

I finish with some welcome news that refers back to the final item in my July report, about the need to tackle polarised division within Quakers: Fred Langridge (YM clerk nominate) informed us about the proposed agenda for Yearly Meeting next May (1st - 4th), where a key theme will be handling conflict among Friends, working to overcome divisiveness and polarisation and, as a Spirit-led community, looking at ways we might work to build connections and foster acceptance and belonging. Addressing such a sensitive matter will take thought, care, time and dependence on the Light in us all. There will be preparation work ahead of YM, where I hope that as Quakers in Scotland we can wholeheartedly embrace and contribute to this work.
(See papers, page 29; minutes, page 9). *

PS! Quaker World Relations Committee ask that Friends with a curiosity about, or a connection to other YM within Europe please notify Central Nominations of your interest as it may be possible for you to attend as a BYM representative.

Additional note from the QiS clerk:

At September General Meeting for Scotland / Quakers in Scotland we heard from Elaine on the previous Meeting for Sufferings, where she reported on the polarised divisions arising from aspects of gender issues that were raised in March. We minuted in response (minute 24/11/13):

“We will return to this matter so that we may feed into the ongoing consideration by Meeting for Sufferings. A method of taking this sensitively will be brought to the November Meeting of Quakers in Scotland.”

In view of this new report, the clerks propose that we wait for guidance that will come out in preparation for Yearly Meeting in May.