

Meeting for Sufferings Report, 5 July 2025. Elaine Millar, Representative for West Scotland Area Meeting and General Meeting for Scotland.

Minutes and papers can be found on the Quakers in Britain website
<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2025-07-follow-up-package>.

I am your representative for General Meeting and West Scotland Area Meeting, and there is also a representative for East Scotland, South East Scotland and North Scotland – that's four of us – less than a handful. When we move to Continuing Yearly Meeting in 2026, my hope is that many more Friends - attenders and members - will consider joining the reps, to be part of our discernment.

I attended this meeting online, but still very much 'in-person' because I find I must make extra efforts to ignore distractions at home - especially in the form of messages firing into in-boxes, my cat demanding strokes and family members blundering into the room by mistake!

I was glad to be reminded by our own Elizabeth Allen, Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) assistant clerk that 'routine business' is never routine. And so it proved to be with the first item, renewing the registration of three Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRB). The third of these, the Quaker Socialist Society (QSS) raised a question about whether it is right for a political-sounding group to be given QRB status. To which the answer came, it is not political with a capital P, with no affiliation to a specific party, but rather is rooted, for over 100 years in the ethical socialism inherent within our Quaker testimonies.

More non-routine, routine business followed, with the adding of thirteen names to the Prison and Court Register. The current trend of conflating activism with terrorism means we will witness more commonly the criminalising of public protest. Indeed, on the day we met it became a criminal offence to support the group Palestine Action.

This led us directly into our first session, a workshop on Quakers and Protest, led by Lyndsay Burtonshaw and Ailish Carroll-Brentnall, staff members from Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) Faith in Action Team. The slides for this have been made available to us to run our own workshops and I will pass these on for meetings to use. The takeaway message is you can still protest, resist and dissent but it is wise to make informed choices about where your actions now sit within the law. Websites Liberty (www.libertyhumanrights.org) and Green & Black Cross were recommended for advice. The latter focuses on England & Wales, but their website signposts to SCALP: Scottish Community & Activist Legal Project (www.scottishactivistlegalproject.co.uk).

However, Lyndsay and Ailish focused more on the emotional and spiritual aspects of activism, and the importance of nurturing interpersonal relationships within our local and area meetings, where a range of different attitudes to protest can lead to divisions. We were urged to use our Quaker practice of spiritual discernment, through meetings for clearness and threshing meetings. Clarifying our natural leaning towards roles they described variously as 'a rebel', 'a citizen', 'a reformer', or 'a social change agent' can bring greater understanding of each other. When we enable these roles to work together, ours is a stronger more coherent body and voice of protest. Above all, the value of upholding each

other is powerful. Lyndsay testified to this as she related her own experience as one of the 'Stansted Fifteen' group of protesters found guilty of blocking the take-off of a deportation flight at Stansted Airport, a charge which carried a potential life sentence: she found the upholding of Friends as a balm. She asked that when we find the actions of 'a rebel' to be unfathomable, to think, how can I support them from where I stand? How can I show love and light to them? Immediately following this excellent session, rather aptly we received a minute from Westminster meeting detailing events when the police raided the meeting house to arrest the six attendees of the protest group, Youth Demand.

The other minute, received from Worcestershire and Shropshire area meeting concerned the implications of the recent Supreme Court judgment (on the meaning of 'sex' in the Equality Act 2010) for trans inclusion and single-sex spaces. Note, this case was brought by the group, 'For Women Scotland' against Scottish ministers. I have been made aware that this issue is also live within Quakers – and not just in the reductive terms of toileting arrangements - and is at risk of becoming polarised and divisive between Friends who wish us to stand up for trans rights for inclusion, and Friends speaking up for women's right for single-sex spaces. Both groups express fears, and both must be heard and must hear each other: perhaps sharing about 'needs' rather than 'rights' would help this process? Meeting for Sufferings were asked whether we wish BYM staff to add to our current position of support for transpeople with public advocacy, leading the way for non-Quaker groups, but it felt clear that we are not ready, having work to do within Quakers first.

Our minute on this read, "Spiritually-grounded conversations and opportunities for learning from our lived experiences will aid this [understanding]; we hope that ways will be found to facilitate this". But I realise, with hindsight this leaves it wishy washy. We need to do this work now, among our local, area and general meetings so that Quakers in Scotland have something helpful to offer to Quakers in Britain.

I want to leave this report here – with a call to action - although there is more to report, not least that General Meeting's minute informing of our move to Quakers in Scotland was accepted and we are held in the Light by Meeting for Sufferings as we move forward.

Please refer to the minutes on the Quakers in Britain website to hear about our trustees' report; progress on 'new ways of belonging' with proposals regarding membership; and consideration of handing on the functions of Meeting for Sufferings to Continuing Yearly Meeting.