



May 25

# Scottish Friend



Photograph 1: Glen Sannox from the summit of Cìr Mhòr, Arran.

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# 1 GM affairs

## 1.1 Calling for General Meeting for Scotland Michael Hutchinson, GM Clerk

Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2025

Dear Friends,  
Greetings to you all!

**Our next General Meeting will be on the 7<sup>th</sup> June at Aberdeen Meeting House, 98 Crown Street AB11 6HJ, and online by Zoom. There will be a preparatory pre-meeting by zoom on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June at 7pm (see below in second box).**

PLEASE REGISTER IN ADVANCE for security online and to help plan hospitality at Aberdeen. Use this link, however you attend:  
<https://tinyurl.com/ynr8rv3k> .

*Please note that you will receive Zoom log in details even if you have registered to attend face to face– this is a default setting of the registration set up. It assists in planning for the number of people expecting to come..*

### **BUSINESS INCLUDES**

- **The Annual report and Accounts prepared by our treasurer and trustees.**
- **Becoming Quakers in Scotland – a proposal for General Meeting to transition into the new Quakers in Scotland body on 20 September.**
- **Our Social Witness.**
- **Plus, reports from the Families Weekend and Meeting for Sufferings, an update on the witness to President Trump’s UK visit and setting priorities for our Local Development Worker in 2026.**

*Today we recognise that we can be a community of transformation as we look to adapt to the change all around us. It won’t be easy, and there will be challenging and questioning. But we have each other. We need to think through how we do things, but we have the resource of each other to draw upon. From GMS minute 22/03/19 Time for reflection: sustaining our Meetings and ourselves.*

After preliminary refreshment from 10:30 am, we will start with open worship at 11.00, break for lunch from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm, and our afternoon session will finish by about 3.30 pm, following which there will be tea.

**Please do join us! All are welcome. North Scotland AM Friends will be providing refreshments beforehand and afterward, for those coming to the meeting house. They are serving soup and light refreshments for lunch. If you need anything more for lunch, please bring it yourself.**



**To help us think about our agenda, we are holding a PREPARATORY PRE-MEETING on Wednesday 4 June at 7pm online for those who wish to attend. This is both to give Friends opportunities to hear and ask about the business coming to us, and also to prepare some routine administrative business to save time on the Saturday.**

**Members of the Quakers in Scotland Co-ordinating Group will be on hand to answer queries and explain the potential ways of working for a single Quaker body for Scotland. Information papers for this will be posted in advance on the General Meeting/Quakers in Scotland website.**

**Queries on other agenda items are also possible.  
The link for the meeting will be sent by email.**

This is an opportunity to meet together with Friends from across Scotland. In a spirit of worship we attend to our church affairs, and matters concerning the spiritual life and witness of Quakers in Scotland. The agenda, and papers to accompany it, will be sent towards the end of May, although some papers are found on the GM website only. A second mailing a few days before GM will include draft minutes and any additional papers. If you do not already receive them, please ask our Administrator, Jane Booth, to come onto the emailing list ([scotfriends@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriends@gmail.com)).

If you have any questions, please contact me, your clerk, by mail [scotfriend-sclerk@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriend-sclerk@gmail.com) or telephone 0141 770 7865. Also email the clerk if you

need instructions on how to get to the Aberdeen Meeting House, parking, etc.

The following General Meeting will be blended again on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September, physically in Perth, and online.

Michael Hutchinson, Clerk  
Susan Mitchell, Assistant Clerk.  
General Meeting for Scotland.



Photograph 2: Cherry blossom, Broomhill, Glasgow.

## **1.2 Report of the GM for Scotland on 9 November Anthony Buxton and Piers Voysey, North Scotland AM**

General Meeting was held in Dundee Quaker Meeting House and online and this report covers both perspectives – Anthony Buxton (Forres) writing from an online experience and Piers Voysey (Forres) from being in Dundee for the Meeting.

General Meeting this time was more about receiving reports than contributing to discernment, but its good to listen and support those beaver away on our behalf. Being there in person has advantages: meeting new Friends, regaining acquaintances with others, being part of the mood of the Meeting, and there was interesting chat about property, rewilding and the US election! Joining online saves a rise before dawn and a return after dinner! Saves a bit on flagging energy!

A reading from Quaker Faith and Practice; 24.57 where Sidney Bailey explains how peace begins with ourselves, a process to be worked on, added to many of the themes in the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group reports introduced by Richard Raggett. Linked to this we also received a very impressive presentation and question time from Ellis Brooks a member of the Peace Education Team of Quaker Peace and Social Witness.

Ellis spoke about the positive reception of the ‘Peace at the Heart’ exhibition in the Scottish Parliament and its positive impact on MSP’s, helped by the presentation from pupils of Oakgrove school in Glasgow. This has led to an opportunity to feed into the review of the curriculum for excellence and has been taken up by the Education Institute of Scotland who were encouraging teachers to use the material and training available from QPSW. A new course on conflict resolution will be available in the new year. Ellis felt that this advocacy and building of alliances through ‘Peace at the Heart’ is coming to fruition and could be built upon and rolled out to more schools where teachers are asking for more help with conflict resolution.

In the afternoon we turned to community justice and agreed a number of appointments to the Action Group. This was followed by presentations from Kate Philbrick, clerk to the group, Andrew Collins and Anneke Kraakman. Andrew spoke about his Norwegian contacts and the talk they had had with an Oslo Friend about the differences in approach with Norway spending a lot more on rehabilitation rather than punishment. We heard about contacts with Maggie Chapman MSP for the Green Party who advocate a similar policy saying that most crime is due to inequality in Society; and work to support Prison Chaplains who are undervalued in the prison system. Community Justice Scotland were focusing on alternatives to prison during Prisons Week in October.



There was agreement on two additional tasks for the group: work to support Interfaith chaplains across the country and to facilitate more Quaker involvement in prisons.

There is gratitude to Michael our clerk and to the gathered Meeting for maintaining some humour and lightness in our handling of business. The greatest consternation of the Meeting seemed to be expressed when trying to set a date for an additional GM this winter in order to discern the way forward for Quakers in Scotland. Squeezing a date into a busy Quaker calendar reflects how involved we are collectively in events that include STUC anti-racism rallies and Woodbrooke study sessions, among many other activities.

For those attending GM in person we received generous hospitality from Dundee Friends. It felt like a celebration of cakes! Tempting to think of it as a Marie-Antoinette of Meetings!



Photograph 3: Loch Sloy.



### 1.3 Report of the Special GM for Scotland on 30 Nov Michael Hutchinson, West Scotland AM

This was an extra special meeting, online only, to continue discernment on the proposals towards a single structural body for Quakers in Scotland. 79 Friends attended, indicating the wide interest. One Friend even logged in from Australia – in the middle of the night there!

We met to review guidance from the four Area Meetings in response to the Quakers in Scotland Co-ordinating Group (QiSCG) Community Subgroup paper *Possible patterns of relationship between meetings of Scottish Friends*. Having all agreed that work towards a single charity should continue, Area Meetings were asked to show preference on possible patterns of relationship between meetings of Scottish Friends, with the options listed as:

1. Maintaining the status quo.
2. The "Welsh model" – keeping AMs as they are within a single charity.
3. No intermediate level between local meetings and a Scotland-wide body.
4. A single area meeting for Scotland with flexible and simpler intermediate levels.

All this was giving opportunity to address concerns raised about how a single Quaker body in Scotland might work. East Scotland AM and North Scotland AM had endorsed option 4, and West Scotland AM suggested that route also. South East Scotland AM had not been able to consider the options yet, but would continue to work on them.

From the responses and previous decision, it is clear that options 1 and 3 were not acceptable, but we need to wait for all Area Meetings to respond before looking further at the remaining options.

Nonetheless, work continues on what has been agreed: setting up a single charity for Quakers in Scotland, with the proposal to replace five existing trustee bodies with one. Area Meetings will still make their own decisions about whether they come into a single charity, but the preparatory work should go ahead to check the details of how it would work, so any resulting questions can be brought back. We appointed the following Friends to serve as Foundation Trustees for the Quakers in Scotland Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) until the end of 2025:

From East Scotland AM: Adwoa Burnley

From North Scotland AM: Brian Ashley

From South East Scotland AM David Somervell and Elizabeth Allen

From West Scotland AM: Chris Holmes

These appointments allow the registration of the new charity to go forward.

Kate Gulliver of the Co-ordinating Group then took us through a presentation “Quakers in Scotland: Where have we got to and what happens next”. We agreed to record this for reference and to post it on the GM website. The presentation went back to the initial concern as raised in 2015 and how it has progressed until today. The message was that ‘Form’ (Quaker structures) depends on ‘function’ (what we need as worshipping communities). The suggestion is that, once the SCIO is registered, General Meeting for Scotland will be the first to transfer its assets and become ‘Quakers in Scotland’. The four Area Meetings and the Dundee Friends Property Trust will then decide, in due time, whether to make similar transitions.

Lesley Richards, convenor of the Quakers in Scotland Co-ordinating Group, also made a presentation comparing options 2 and 4. She described the ‘Welsh model’, where four area meetings and Crynwyr Cymru - Quakers in Wales are forming a single charity for Wales and part of the English Marches, Lesley compared this model (option 2 in our case) where area meetings are retained, with the ‘intermediate model’ (option 4). The latter is less precise but more flexible, in that groups of local meetings can work together in various ways.

It is clear that, as we move towards a ‘Quakers in Scotland’, that there is much more to do in establishing how we work together as individual Meetings, in whichever structural model we end up.

We were reminded that our spiritual life and processes, the basis of our being as a Religious Society, continue the same. The structural change aims to strengthen these as we adapt to new situations. Our meetings for worship, including those for business, rely on our trusting of the leadings of the Spirit. We all have work to do in coming together in our worshipping communities to become familiar with the information we have on becoming Quakers in Scotland and in identifying issues to take further.

One of the issues concerning some Friends about moving towards a single body was how to cope with the amount of business. Already, it is putting pressure on General Meeting agendas so that Friends have less chance to contribute to the matters before us. So, the clerks have started to experiment with an optional ‘pre-meeting’ an evening or two before the formal business meeting. This happened on the Wednesday before this time, and some 16 Friends came. Friends had time to raise concerns and issues to do with the Saturday agenda in a calm and listening atmosphere. It was a very helpful meeting, allowing more insight into issues and giving a supportive atmosphere for informal discussion where everyone was valued. It certainly buoyed me up as clerk. I was reminded of a previous minute on this process, part of which read:

“We know that communities can be many things at once: both a respite and a burden, and showing both hope and fear. A worry comes as we see the importance of what has been built up that we don’t want to lose. We live

in a time of fear; for our communities, our world, and our planet. This can be reflected in our meetings too, so we have to be responsive to each other. There are new ways of doing things; new ways to connect to each other in a spirit of worship.

We do have struggles in adapting to change, but we are looking at it head on, taking advantage of what is possible by taking responsibility for our future together. We have flexibility. We look after each other and share our experiences. There is growth all around us despite our difficulties. There is a lot of hope in our communities as well.

Today we recognise that we can be a community of transformation as we look to adapt to the change all around us. It won't be easy, and there will be challenging and questioning. But we have each other. We need to think through how we do things, but we have the resource of each other to draw upon".



Photograph 4: A trig point on Ben Vorlich.

## 1.4 Report of the GM for Scotland on 8 March

### Alice Curteis, East Scotland AM

At Edinburgh's Quaker Meeting House the cheerful sounds of café life and laughter drift through the open windows on a warm sunny day. So it was on March 8th when 66 Friends attended General Meeting for Scotland (GMS), half of them online, to consider an agenda which paid attention to the regular business of GM while giving most of our time to the theme of peace.

Our regular business included the trustees' report and news of the work of bringing Scottish Quakers into a single charity.

At the heart of the day's focus on peace Paul Parker, BYM Recording Clerk, spoke on 'Peacebuilding in Dark Times'. He began by starkly listing the many crises we face, the violence and destruction being caused by political and climate disruption. It is easy to despair. He then asked 'What can Quakers say and what can Quakers do?', questions which resonated with all we heard and discussed.

For Scottish Quakers this was an opportunity to look at how our peace testimony is expressed on our behalf through GM-supported work. So we heard from groups involved in parliamentary engagement, in interfaith and ecumenical work, and in work with younger Friends.

The Parliamentary Engagement Working Group's work on climate justice and human rights is challenging, with the government insisting on ever more growth and increases in defence spending at the expense of international aid. But longterm relationships have been built up with cross party MSPs by treating them with respect as human beings rather than just making demands and criticising them. The group is looking for and finding common ground where it exists with members of various parties. Along with Christian Aid and our Criminal Justice Working Group, PEWG is getting involved in manifesto meetings with parties ahead of next year's parliamentary election.

The thread of finding common ground continued with news of Ecumenical and Interfaith Engagement. No fewer than nine reports had been received by GM or published in the Scottish Friend from our representatives on bodies such as Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, the Iona Community, and National InterFaith Days. Some of the value of this connection was summed up by a couple of comments: 'When an issue arises we know each other if we meet regularly.' 'Peace in the world won't happen without peace between religions.' Local Development Worker, Zoe Prosser, reminded us of the tools we have to make and build peace within our own communities. This starts with looking for 'seeds of war' within ourselves and remembering what is available to us as Quakers: our experience of silence and listening, whether from the structure and discipline of Meetings for Business for Worship, worship sharing or meetings for clearness and for threshing; the social and learning experiences that help us get to know each other; our eldership and pastoral teams' work

to care for the life of meetings.

Peace is also the theme of this year's Children's and Young People's events, with Peace Cafes planned, and hopefully a young Palestinian visitor to Summer Shindig.

A period of worship sharing allowed powerful insights to emerge including

- Everyone can use their lives in acts of resistance to the darkness we find all around us.
- We are called to take action, but there is also great value in prayerfully upholding and supporting those who do.
- We can be 'prophets or reconcilers' but not both at the same time; sometimes we need to be the ones who stand up and speak truth under concern, and at other times we need to open the door and invite others to come and sit with us and listen.
- Self care is essential, along with gratitude for what we have.



Photograph 5: Track leading to Loch Ossian.

## 2 Meetings for Sufferings Report

### Elaine Millar

(minutes and papers can be found on the [Quakers in Britain website](#))

#### **YEARLY MEETING (YM): Friday 23 – Monday 26 May 2025**

- The peace testimony will be at the heart of the all age programme and our discernment, viewed in three main ways:
  - Conflict and violence in our local communities across Britain.
  - Radical peacemakers.
  - Aspects of international peace work done on our behalf.
- We were urged to encourage Friends to attend at Friends House or online and to let Friends know we can support in many ways - as ‘buddies’, with tech, financially – so please don’t allow anything to stop you!
- There will be preparation sessions online from Sunday 27 April to Saturday 3 May (sign on by 6 April) and these are so valuable in enhancing your YM experience. Understanding the Quaker business method and the reasons for its underlying discipline also assist the process hugely, so do join in yearly-meeting-2025-preparing-for-yearly-meeting. There’s still time to register, until 24 April.

#### **POLICE POWERS & PROTEST**

- The original purpose of Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) is increasingly being enacted some 350 years later as we record the names in the Prison & Court Register of Friends arrested, going through court proceedings, fined or imprisoned for witnessing to their faith through public protest. Their names, both members and attenders are recorded regardless of whether they are discharged or acquitted.
- Scotland is not subject to the same new policing laws in England and Wales but worrying police tactics at protests and harsher sentencing are just as evident here.
- Area meetings (AM) are responsible for establishing the facts about Friends who are arrested when acting under concern – local meetings (LM) should bring names (with the permission of the Friends) to AM who, following discernment, forward to MfS.
- Direct action is not for all, but there are other ways to support, such as writing to MPs, and providing hospitality and refreshment to those appearing in court and to their supporters. We heard that for activist Friends, knowing they are being held in the light makes a significant difference, so do not undervalue this way of supporting.

#### **QCCIR (Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations)**

- This committee is all about working together with other denominations and faiths, creating and maintaining opportunities for on-going dialogue to build peace, rather than dwelling on differences which might drive us apart.

- A restructuring of the committee into 3 working groups: Inter-church, interfaith and spirituality/theology means involving a wider group of Friends who can be co-opted to a specific group of interest.
- QCCIR ask AMs to seek the names of Friends with an interest in any of these groups, so please let it be known if any of these strands catches your interest.

## **CONTINUING YEARLY MEETING (CYM)**

- A big change is afoot with the laying down of MfS in March 2026 and moving to CYM. It was suggested it might help Friends to reframe this change as YM held across 4 meetings a year, instead of one and open to all to participate.
- Representation for AMs and General Meeting (GM) and other Quaker bodies will be through one rep who BYM fund, but with no official alternate – because, if the rep cannot attend another Friend can deputise as CYM is open to all.
- It is hoped continuity of rep attendance will optimise the right-holding of meetings, where the business method and discernment process become more familiar to more Friends.
- Without the alternate system, support for the role can come in whatever way works best for the rep and the body they represent.
- The rep does not need to be a member but bear in mind in rare circumstances attenders would be excluded from a closed session, such as for discernment about changes to church governance.
- With the potential for more Friends attending CYM, increased financial support may need to be budgeted for.
- A residential will be held every 3 years and 1 meeting a year will be held outwith London.
- Nothing is set in stone yet – come to Yearly Meeting to be part of the discernment.

## **Quaker Housing Trust (QHT)**

The Trust's report reminded us to:

- Challenge the prevailing attitude that regards housing as a financial asset rather than a home, where those without a place to call home grow increasingly marginalised.
- Be aware of QHT Quaker Asset Fund which helps LMs and AMs investigate if their properties might be converted in full or in part to provide social housing.
- Consider donating, as individuals or AMs, because demand outstrips funds.
- Consider passing to QHT any unearned increase in value on properties owned, when liquidated.

## **Sustainability & Climate**

- An overview of sustainability work across BYM, including central work, the work of specific Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRB) and work with GM, AMs and LMs was overseen by The Sustainability Monitoring Group and



will now be passed to the new Agenda Planning Committee for CYM, to bear in mind and keep in sight the need for:

- A new method of reporting on sustainability that takes into account ways to feedback from all the above areas into our decision-making structures.
- A recognition that resilience and community building might be more important work now than measuring carbon emissions.
- The setting of targets to moving this work forward.



Photograph 6: Arenberg castle, Leuven, Belgium.

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## 3 Ecumenical Matters

### 3.1 Finland Yearly Meeting Autumn Gathering Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM

**AitO centre, near Tampere, and travelling in the ministry around Finland 23 September – 7 October 2024**

Having been officially appointed by Britain Yearly Meeting [BYM] to attend Finland Yearly Meeting's [FYM] Spring Gathering earlier this year, I was delighted to be able to return for the Autumn Gathering at the end of September.

I began my visit with a short stay in Helsinki, where I met up with some Ffriends. I then went to stay with my niece and her partner in Jyväskylä before meeting up with Lari in Tampere and then travelling with Toni and Leena to AitO centre.

The overarching theme of the Gathering was *UBUNTU – care of creation*. It was rich and fulfilling, and I met and shared with Friends old and new.

There was, as ever, much to get done in the two business sessions on the Saturday. There were admin and financial matters to deal with. A feedback session from the newly-established communications group led to a discussion of the whole issue of *communications* – the current FYM website, ways to reach out, to attract seekers and enquirers. Could the Tampere Friends' Facebook page be a way of publicising what's going on in other areas too? Does this all need outsourcing – *pay* someone to update the website, to deal with the archive and the existing Quaker library, which has no home since the Helsinki Quaker flat was sold?

*How do we care for each other?* Many Finnish Friends are isolated. It was decided to have an on-line discussion session in October to allow Friends to share their thoughts on this. Another quarterly on-line discussion session was offered, where Friends could come and talk about one of BYM's Advices and queries.

Aino had been appointed to attend the World Plenary in South Africa this August. Much of the preparatory material was emailed round Friends in the months leading up to the Gathering, and there had been on-line preparation sessions [one of which I joined] looking at two of the Gathering's three themes. At AitO we focused on the care of creation aspect of Ubuntu. On the Friday evening, we shared in pairs our thoughts on what sort of relationship do I want to have with the land I live on? before a worship-sharing session about what will nourish my soul and the earth?

On Saturday we spent time in pairs, listening without interrupting while one person spoke their response to, firstly, I exist because you exist, and be-

cause creation exists and then what is my calling/ what concern is closest to my heart? On Sunday, after joining together in worship, Aino read out the tapestry document produced by those at the World Plenary. We focused on the part of it asking us to look at the causes of injustice in the world and listen to that of God in others before speaking out. "As Friends we are called to action in the world, as individuals and as communities. . . we are reminded of our brokenness, and we are challenged by the spirit of Christ to take action in the world". We shared our responses to the question what might we, as a community, be called to do together?

One of the highlights of the weekend for me is the Saturday night sauna, and this time was no exception. Instead of using the sauna inside the main building, we used the one on the shore of the lake – which meant that, instead of cooling off in the adjacent swimming pool, we had the option to go outside and down a wooden 'staircase' straight into the lake. . . it was cold!! I don't think I could have got myself under the water without the encouragement of the women who'd already got into the water - but I did, three times in all, and felt very proud of myself.

Representatives are appointed each year for various overseas gatherings, and on Sunday we heard from Antti, who attended Britain Yearly Meeting last July and whom I met at various sessions. He started off thinking 'it's so long before they do anything' – but by the end of the YM, he came to see that 'yes, they do do things', although our big structural reorganisation didn't particularly interest him. He was greatly struck by a session on climate choirs and the power of the silent protest for peace outside Friends House, and deeply impressed by the Swarthmore Lecture, saying "every Quaker has to listen to this". His report prompted discussion about whether to appoint someone new for BYM 2025, or have someone go a second time. This led into a general sharing of our thoughts from the weekend, before we said goodbye and went our separate ways.

Taina lives in Oulu and has recently come to Friends. I see her at the on-line worship, and met her for the first time at this year's Spring Gathering. She had invited me to stay with her for a few days. It's a long drive north from Tampere, so she chose to break the journey with a stay in an Airbnb house. There we were joined by her friend Soile and her dog Sylvi – who even came with us into the wood-fired sauna. Afterwards some questions led to a long conversation about business meeting which Soile found most interesting. Continuing the drive northward enabled yet more wide-ranging conversation, and more Finnish language lessons.

During my time in Oulu, Taina and I met up with an enquirer, Raimo. James, an American with a long acquaintance with Friends, and Jane, who hosted me on my first-ever visit to FYM, also joined us. Another wide-ranging conversation ensued, where I, as 'a real Quaker from outside Finland' was able to contribute my perspective.

I went south by train to Hämeenlinna, which I had often passed on the train going north or south. I was looking forward to spending time with Aino, who is the only Quaker in the area. She introduced me to a wonderful forest area – Aulinko – and I explored the castle on my own. There was a fascinating and moving textile exhibition which focused on the once enormous and flourishing, now defunct local flax industry. My visit was particularly timely, as Aino had arrived at a very important life decision and I was able to offer support and a listening ear from outside her Finnish Quaker circle.

From Hämeenlinna I went north again to Tampere, where I met my daughter Ruth for lunch! She was on her own trans-European trip, and our paths crossed. She and I explored the city a little before going back to the railway station to meet up with my niece Kate, with whom Ruth was going to spend the weekend, and Leena, with whom I was going to stay for the rest of my time in Finland.

Being in Tampere on a Saturday meant that I could worship with Tampere Friends, which I've been wanting to do for years. There were familiar faces from various Gatherings, including my very dear friend Ville-Pekka, in whose lakeside sauna house I have stayed more than once. The warmth of their welcome had me musing in Meeting: how much warmer is God's welcome any and every time I show up to spend time with God. This is something I need to remember every day.

On the Sunday I was very glad to have a low-key day with Leena, before flying home on the Monday. In the two weeks of my visit, I'd not spent more than three nights in any one place, generally moving on every second day. It was both tiring and mildly stressful waking up every morning thinking is this the day I move on? and packing and unpacking every other day. It was a challenge to navigate new places and spend time with new people, while also trying to improve my Finnish.

It was also richly rewarding in so many ways – Finland and Finnish Friends are a joy and a delight, and I never cease to give thanks for that first BYM appointment to visit in 2019.

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## 3.2 Two National InterFaith Days

Kate Arnott, SE Scotland AM

The first of these, Faith and Belief Conference, was organised by the Scottish Government and was by invitation. It was held in Edinburgh at the gorgeous Mansfield Traquair Centre. Attending were representatives from Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, including Crossroads, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan and Sikh faiths. In addition there were representatives from Edinburgh Interfaith Association, Interfaith Glasgow and Interfaith Scotland. Plus the Evangelical Alliance. There were people from the Humanist Society of Scotland. There were scholars, consultants, voluntary organisations and BBC Scotland. Finally there were representatives from several statutory agencies: Careers, Colleges and Universities, Police, Scottish Government and the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service.

The Opening Address was by John Swinney who impressed me. Far too often politicians, especially senior politicians, at a Conference, come, deliver their own speech and leave, listening minimally to what others have to say. He stayed all morning and was clear that he had wanted to stay all day but was required to go back to Holyrood as the Budget was being delivered at Westminster that day and he had to be in the Scottish Parliament to respond. He stated this was a significant day bringing together representatives from various faiths who had made such a contribution to the country Scotland is today. All major faiths have compassion as a key component of their belief and action and can contribute towards greater tolerance and understanding in a polarised culture. He was followed by the Minister for Equalities Kaukab Stewart who underlined the vital work being carried out to tackle hatred by all faiths, collaborating and strengthening diversity. Both emphasised the importance of faith for individuals and for communities (this seems very unlike England where the InterFaith Network was dissolved in quite a Donald Trump way). Places of worship are open to all and were opened as soon as possible after COVID lockdowns ended as they are an enormous and vital resource, not just for individual believers but for the wider communities, providing as they do a vast range of services.

The third speaker was Mona Siddique, Professor of Islamic Studies at Edinburgh University, who focussed on challenges for democracy with growing divisions and rapid changes in Europe. 5 presentations followed:

- A Jewish-Christian Glossary
- A Senior Public Sector Policy Adviser Role
- Challenging Conversations and Difficult Dialogues
- Iman Hussain Blood Donation Campaign Scotland
- Edinburgh Interfaith Association Roadshows

I found the Iman Hussain Blood Donation presentation with speakers from the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society and the Scottish Blood Transfusion Service the most interesting. A very focussed, perhaps narrow, initiative to increase – successfully – the number of Muslim blood donors.

We had been allocated tables with the programme and these sessions were followed by tea, coffee, cake and networking through discussion sessions at our table. After lunch 2 people from BBC Scotland spoke and then followed questions and answers. The final formal session was a 30 minute faith forum with representatives of Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths.

The most useful aspect of the day for me was realising how blessed I am to live in Scotland with a government committed to valuing networking, service and action by so many faith communities.

The second National InterFaith Conference was organised by Interfaith Scotland to celebrate 20 years of Interfaith Week. The host city for the Conference was Dundee; the festival theme of ‘Discovery’ was inspired by Dundee. Interfaith Scotland believe that encouraging people to discover and learn about the lives of others is an effective way to challenge prejudice and misunderstanding both inside of us and in the world around us.

We were welcomed to this celebration by Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, who will be known to many Scottish Friends and by the Lord Provost of Dundee - Councillor Bill Campbell. Dundee is a city of many different faiths.

They should have been followed by Kaukab Stewart, Minister for Equalities in the Scottish Government, but she was prevented so her statement was read by Maureen. Ms Stewart expressed heartfelt support and much appreciation for the work of Interfaith Scotland and faith communities.

Frances Hume, National development Officer of Interfaith Scotland, then gave a history of the rich religious and cultural diversity shown during Interfaith week with Interfaith week being celebrated from Shetland to Dumfries (I recognised Quaker faces in the accompanying slides) with a huge range of projects and types of events and, importantly, Scottish Government support for these initiatives.

3 brief interesting events followed, the launch of the Interfaith Tapestry, a gorgeous tapestry with, similar to the Quaker tapestry, much input from many individuals and groups, the Dundee University Choir and an account of how the Dundee Faith Covenant came about and its value to the city, the peoples of Dundee, including faith communities.

Charandeep Singh then delivered the keynote address which is available on Interfaith Scotland website. He is the Deputy Chief Executive at the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and, as well as many other roles, he is the founding

member of the Sikh food bank.

The final event of the morning, before lunch, was the awarding of three inter-faith fellowship awards. The afternoon sessions were workshops on :

- Generations working together
- Engaging Young People in Interfaith Dialogue
- Supporting needs of faith communities in diverse settings
- Tackling hate crime in Scotland

The day finished with delicious anniversary cake and refreshments.

I found it to be a very valuable day and would like to thank General Meeting for enabling my participation at both fascinating days.



Photograph 7: St Monan's church, Fife.



## 4 Book of Discipline Revision Committee

### Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM

#### 4.1 October 2024 update

**University of Warwick, Coventry 11–13 October 2024**

Your committee's twenty-first meeting was held at the University of Warwick in Coventry over the weekend 11-13 October. Most of us were physically present, others joined remotely as they were able. One member joined us from Pendle Hill Quaker Study Centre in Pennsylvania, where she is currently a Friend in Residence. It was a long time since our last residential meeting, so we were very glad to be in each other's company. We worked hard, and enjoyed catching up with each other at meal and break times. As ever, there wasn't enough time to do everything, but we did our best!

We were delighted to be joined by Paul Parker, our Recording Clerk, and Linda Craig, whose immensely valuable guidance and support as our project manager helped us as we emerged from lockdown. She was, as ever, both encouraging and straightforward. At our brief August online 'check in' she commended us on our progress – we are on track to meet our proposed timeline – and outlined the questions we need to consider as we begin to move towards the next stage of our work. She also spent individual time with anyone who wanted to talk to her about our work, and these conversations helped her suggest our next steps.

We are nearing the end of the first part of our work – assembling text on a wide range of topics. Some of these texts were written in the early days of our work, others more recently. All of them will need a greater or lesser amount of work to ensure that they match the writing style we've developed over the past five and a half years. Some texts are still being completed, and two new groups were set up this weekend, to write about Quaker history and Where are we going?

We have not yet written new Advices and Queries, and no formal group has been set up. At our Wednesday evening online 'pre-meeting' we shared our personal responses to the question what's important to me about the current Advices and Queries? Earlier in the committee's life, we all had a go at writing individual text on a subject, producing extremely interesting material on which to do further work. This weekend we were asked [if we have capacity] to do something similar. We could try drafting individual advices or queries, editing the existing ones, reviewing them, or simply exploring the concept and seeing what we come up with. What would you do, Friends?

On Saturday morning we concentrated on the structure for the Book and our project timeline. We are very happy with our proposed 'tree' structure: its roots reach down into our Quaker history and the trunk is composed of

the core elements of our Quakerism – worship, discernment, and our spiritual experience and theology. The three main branches growing out of this trunk are our Quaker community, the way we live out our Quaker faith in our lives, and what we do ‘in the world’. There are many creative possibilities for layout and links in electronic versions, but translating this into a 2-D book needs a lot of careful thought. Topics will be arranged in some sort of sequence: which ones lead into each other or need to be near each other? Is anything missing?

Linda Craig told us that she was really impressed with all we’ve produced and how far we’ve come. Most topics will be banked as ‘good enough’ by mid-2025, and we can continue working on many things while waiting for the results of Yearly Meeting’s continuing consideration of membership. Now the decision has been made to move to a continuing Yearly Meeting [YM] from 2026, we will be able to bring matters to YM more swiftly. Britain Yearly Meeting [BYM] staff will be able to help with a lot of things now, we don’t have to wait till our work is further forward.

Many things need thinking about, including finding non-text material [e.g. pictures, recordings] and working out what formats we need to offer to enable Friends to engage with the text. What will this cost? Are we planning on sharing any more text [as we did with the Marriage and Nominations drafts] before YM Gathering 2027? We hope to offer the finalised first draft towards the end of 2026 so that it can be considered in advance of YM Gathering 2027. We discerned that the amount of work involved in preparing the complete draft text and preparing Friends to receive and engage with it means that we do not have the capacity to share any other text. Instead, we will focus on making sure that Friends are aware of our work and what is being proposed [see below].

Saturday afternoon was spent considering several draft texts, some of which are ‘good enough’ and can be banked. We spent time in discernment regarding a concern that had been raised some time ago about the ethical implications of publishing the names of individuals under 18. Should we put any names to the extracts in the main text of the Book? What about people whose names have changed since they wrote the passage we want to quote? Why do we want to name contributors? Do they then ‘get put on a pedestal’? This is a Book of many voices: if none are named, how do we realise this? The Children and Young People’s Voices group will liaise with BYM staff on this.

We also spent time reflecting on our current use of ‘god language’ in our draft text. We had decided to use one of four words – God, Spirit, the Divine, the Light – in any one piece of text, and have an introductory passage explaining the many and varied terms Quakers use to name the ineffable, indescribable Mystery. Some committee members’ comments - I’m happy with ‘god’, but don’t know how anyone else is interpreting that word; We need to have conversations with each other about the hole which some of us

fill with ‘god’; We don’t know what ‘god’ is – we know better what ‘god’ isn’t. There is no easy answer, we have to continue working on this. Perhaps one of the Advices and Queries should say remember that when you hear the word ‘God’ the image in your head is not necessarily the one in the speaker’s.

The Communicating with Friends group [CwF] has not been doing ‘official visits’ to talk about and invite discussion of our work for some time, though individual Friends have responded to personal invitations to talk about our work. The group has concentrated on social media releases and preparing and presenting sessions on our work at Yearly Meeting preparation sessions. We will continue to offer sessions at YM 2025 and 2026 – what might their content be? How will we prepare Friends in Britain for the release of the complete draft text? There was a very successful reading Quaker faith and practice programme in advance of the YM at which we discerned that the time was right to start work on a new book of discipline. Should we consider something similar? The CwF group was asked to think about all this and come to our January 2025 online committee weekend with suggestions.

Instead of our usual closing Meeting for Worship, our clerks invited us to contribute, if led, to a period of worship-sharing and community building. We had worked very hard over the weekend, and there was never enough time to talk to each other in the breaks. Our newest members were having to dive deep into the work while also getting to know the rest of the committee. The sharing was rich and deep and brought us closer together. Our key messages:

1. *We have now met for twenty-one meetings. Thank you for upholding us all in our work. We are on track to present a complete first draft text in late 2026 for consideration at Yearly Meeting 2027.*
2. *What do Advices and Queries mean to you? We have been reflecting on this question for ourselves as we consider how best to prepare for the revision of Advices and Queries that we will begin to draft in July 2025.*
3. *We are thinking about the table of contents for the new book and have been exploring different ways of grouping and ordering topics for a variety of readerships.*
4. *We recognise that people have different preferences and requirements for accessing information and publications. Planning for accessible formats for the book of discipline has begun.*
5. *We have been using suggestions sent through our submissions system and thank everyone who has helped us in this way. We continue to look for text, images, music, and other materials which express a wide range of Quaker experience of all aspects of life, today and in previous generations. Please keep sending ideas.*

Our next meeting will be on line, over the last weekend in January 2025. Please continue to uphold us in your prayers – we can’t do this without your support.

## 4.2 January 2025 update

It was good to gather again after so many months apart, even if only online. Wednesday evening's session was mainly concerned with receiving progress reports from many of our topic groups, noting that some sizeable papers would be being discussed over the weekend. We heard reports from Friends who'd been at the Future of Quakerism in Britain conference, and from our Clerks' December update to Meeting for Sufferings. Our 'tree' image for the structure of the new book was well received, and we hope to be able to share this more widely soon. We need to consult with Crynwyr Cymru Friends in Wales to ensure that Welsh language content meets the needs of Friends in Wales.

The weekend was packed full - three zoom sessions on Saturday, and one long one on Sunday morning. In our opening worship we heard again the advice from Aotearoa New Zealand to use as few words as possible but as many as are necessary - both in our work over the weekend and as we move into the next stage of our work as a committee.

Dates to note: Monday 28 April 7pm - one online session by the BDRC as part of the preparation sessions for Yearly Meeting. We have been invited to be a part of the BYM 'work fair' at Friends House [23-26 May], and our clerks will contribute to YM's Friday evening session.

Looking beyond Yearly Meeting 2025, the Communicating with Friends [CwF] group will consider how we start engaging with Friends in advance of the release of our completed draft text at Yearly Meeting 2027. Meeting for Sufferings has suggested that Friends in Britain engage with looking at our current Advices & Queries, thinking about their purpose and how we use them [see MfS's December 2024 minutes for more information].

BYM has decided to disengage from X [formerly Twitter]. We considered our current use of social media. We will ask Friends House staff to post our key messages on their social media, which will reach a wider audience than our BDRC media channels. YM staff post 'highlights of committees' on the BYM website, and the BDRC will contribute.

We have just had our sixth birthday as a committee, and celebrate this by preparing to move into the next stage of our work. We had discerned that writing Advices & Queries and the introduction to the whole book would be done towards the end of the writing process. We will now begin this work while also completing those topic drafts that are still unfinished. At the same time, we will get all our 'banked' text out of storage, review it, and begin putting it all together. We'll also be considering the use of non-text material - pictures and audio/ video material.

Just a little extra work, then??!!

Friends, we need your loving support as we move into this new part of our work.

Our key messages from this weekend: *Friends are reminded that our 5th report to Meeting for Sufferings in December 2024 is available now on the Revising Quaker Faith & Practice page of the BYM website*

*We have been using suggestions sent through our submissions system and thank everyone who has helped us in this way. We also continue to look for text, images, music, and other non-text materials which express a wide range of Quaker experience of all aspects of life, today and in previous generations. Please keep sending ideas via our submission tool or padlet.[see links below]*

*We plan to consult with Crynwyr Cymru-Quakers in Wales as how we can best work together to ensure that content in Welsh in our new book will meet the needs of Welsh-speaking Friends.*

*We have reviewed the use of social media for the current phase of our work and will be communicating updates via BYM channels. Follow Quakers in Britain on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Bluesky.*

*We are on track to present a first full draft of the new book for consideration at Yearly Meeting 2027. We are starting work on the final topics in our list; this includes looking at Advices and Queries, and we have shared different approaches to drafting a revised A&Q. We have also started looking at the big task of reviewing all of our work so far to bring together this first full draft.*

*Friends will be able to register to join our Special Interest Group at Britain Yearly Meeting online at 7pm on Monday evening 28 April 2025. We will offer both an update on our work and the chance to explore the purpose and impact of the current Advices & Queries with us. Links to the BYM submissions tool and the Open To New Light padlet site <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/qfp-idea/> and [www.padlet.com/bdrc/opentonewlight](http://www.padlet.com/bdrc/opentonewlight)*

### 4.3 April 2025 update

As we move into the next phases of our work, we are aware of the heavy workload these will entail. It is vital that all our members feel supported: our pastoral care Friends suggested ways we might be able to communicate informally and, when needed, let off steam. Two committee members have indicated that, for personal reasons, they need to stand back from our work for a year. We will not seek new members for the committee, but we can, where necessary, co-opt people to help us with aspects of our work.

The membership of our new working groups, which include Advices & Queries, and the Introduction to the whole text, was confirmed. Other groups were laid down, having reached the end of their task. Updates from all the topic groups which are currently ‘live’ confirm that we are nearing the end of this part of our work.

Looking at our timeline, we were again encouraged to realise just how much we have done over the past six years. We are well aware of how much still needs done before our text is handed over to the publications team at Friends House, who will prepare the draft for British Friends’ consideration. Bea Robinson gave us some insights into what that work will entail. Our goal is to have the text ready to hand over early in 2026: it will be available for Friends to study towards the end of 2026 and brought to Yearly Meeting 2027 for consideration.

Part of our work going forward is to prepare for YM 2025 – the preparation session is on Monday April 28 at 7pm. Our clerks will take part in the business on the Friday evening of YM itself. They will also be working closely with the new Agenda Committee during the imminent transition to Continuing Yearly Meeting.

The Communicating with Friends group, of which I’m a part, have not had a vast amount to do for the last year or so. We are now preparing for the major challenge of keeping British Friends informed about what’s going on, preparing for the release of the new draft text, and helping them engage with it once it is released. Our Book is one in a long line of Books of Discipline used in Britain Yearly Meeting – but for many of us, Quaker faith & practice is the only one we’ve ever known.

All this new work requires different skills to those we have been using until now and, while some of us are very happy with this situation, others are more apprehensive. All of us, though, know from experience on this committee that we will discover gifts we didn’t know we had and that together we will rise to the challenges we face. Please continue to uphold us with your prayers!

#### Key messages:

- *Our priority throughout 2025 is to complete our work on the first full draft of the content for the new book, to be ready by late 2026 for inclu-*

*sion in Documents in Advance ahead of Yearly Meeting in July 2027. We are working closely with the Publications Team of Quakers in Britain on planning for the production of the draft.*

- *We have commenced work on the drafting and updating of Advices & Queries.*
- *We hope to reflect voices of Quaker children and young people in the new book, and have gathered some potential material for inclusion.*
- *Friends at Yearly Meeting 2025 will have several opportunities to hear more about our overall progress, both at the Special Interest Meeting on 28 April online and during Yearly Meeting in session in May.*



Photograph 8: Beinn Breac and Glas Choirein from Bealach an Fharaidh, north west Arran.



## 5 Parliamentary Engagement Working Group

### 5.1 Peacebuildings as a PEWG priority: a review of an active year PEWG

Peacebuilding is one of the three ‘priority’ areas that your Parliamentary Engagement Working Group [PEWG] and our Parliamentary Engagement Officer [PEO], Sarah Komashko, strive to work in through our advocacy with Scottish Parliamentarians – directly and through work with valued allies. It’s also been one of the most fruitful in the past year.

One year on from the Peace at the Heart [PATH] events in the Scottish Parliament in September 2023 seemed a good time to review this work. We were so glad that Ellis Brooks, Peace Education Coordinator for Quakers in Britain, was able to join us on screen at November’s GM (where Peace work was our theme). Ellis lifted our spirits by sharing developments in peace education in Scotland over the course of that year. You can see the slides that Ellis shared with us at GM on the Quakers in Scotland website [here](#) and to complement these, the following section pulls together the advocacy progress made by Sarah working alongside Ellis.

#### Peace education

During the Peace at the Heart of Scottish Schools exhibition and in the weeks afterward, many MSPs signed a motion supporting the conclusions of the PATH report, and calling for the wider roll-out of peace education. We were also able to meet with several MSPs afterwards, discussing the conclusions of the report and helping Scottish Mediation make connections with local councils’ education departments. One MSP also connected us to the Scottish Youth Parliament.

We are also currently working with a subgroup of people from IDEAS [International Development Education Association of Scotland], a network of organisations and individuals across Scotland involved in Global Citizenship Education to press for peace education to be incorporated into the curriculum via Learning for Sustainability.

- We wrote to Education Cabinet Secretary Jenny Gilruth, setting out arguments in favour of peace education and calling for the incorporation of peace education into the curriculum. She responded very helpfully, putting us in touch with key people to speak with on curriculum potential for peace education and related approaches.
- On 1 October Sarah and Ellis, together with allies from Christian Aid and Peace Education Scotland met with two key representatives of Education Scotland [ES] – the Lead on Religious and Moral Education,

and the Lead on Science and Learning for Sustainability. (ES is the improvement agency for Scottish education.) Here are some positives from the meeting:

- Those present recognised the importance of peace education and its links to various different parts of the curriculum, including RME, Learning for Sustainability, social sciences, and health and wellbeing. This is particularly so in the context of global conflict as well as reports of poor classroom behaviour.
- It came at a good time, as ES is currently thinking about 2030-40 curriculum in the curriculum improvement cycle.
- We were invited to supply ES with names of Peace Education contacts who would be available to input into the curriculum review and could ensure the focus is kept on peace education.
- ES has just added a portal on ‘Learning for sustainability’ resources to website, and would be happy to hear from Ellis about relevant resources and could embed any video content on the portal.
- ES sends out comms regularly on Twitter and Glow (the resource base used by most Scottish teachers). Any new resources or communications could be sent to ES and they’d be happy to repost them.
- STARME (Scottish Teachers Association of Religious and Moral Education) are planning their 2025 conference for May and will be putting out a call for sessions for their conference soon which could be a good opportunity for us and/or Christian Aid to speak to RME teachers about peace education.

It is so encouraging to see that Quaker Peace Education thinking is now part of the conversation in Scotland.

## **Talks with Scottish Enterprise about funding to arms companies**

For the PEWG, the second strand of our Peacebuilding work in 2024 has been engagement with Scottish Enterprise [SE] regarding public funding of companies producing arms.

SE is a Scottish Government agency tasked with stimulating external investment and supporting Scottish business. It invests around £300million a year, sometimes through loans but often through direct investment grants (some of which must be matched by other investors or by the company itself).

Many Friends are doubtless aware of work done by Campaign Against the Arms Trade [CAAT], investigating and publicising SE’s investments in companies which manufacture and export arms. Partly as a result of a CAAT report, in 2019, SE introduced human rights checks after it was criticised for funding arms firms selling to countries with poor human rights records.

These checks include assessing whether a company has been “associated with human rights abuses anywhere in the world”. Despite that, and despite the last First Minister publicly calling upon the UK government to suspend arms companies’ licences to export arms to Israel, SE has continued investing in firms with export links to countries accused of violations of human rights. The firms funded include Thales, Raytheon, and Leonardo. According to reporting, and as confirmed by SE, no firm has failed a human rights check to date.

This obviously causes concern to us, and the PEWG started by meeting with the Minister for Trade who is responsible for SE. As a result of this meeting and the subsequent correspondence, we met online with senior officials at SE in June of this year. At this meeting, we shared our concerns about Scottish public money finding its way to arms manufacturers, some of whose products are going to countries where there are documented human rights violations.

We also looked at the issue from a sustainability standpoint, asking about the “carbon footprint”, i.e. military carbon emissions resulting from conflict and the use of these weapons. We asked SE how this sat with their net zero commitments, and with the need for the Government to leverage investments into companies that will help us get to a green and sustainable economy, such as heat pump and wind turbine installations.

The dialogue was instructive, and we are now reflecting on SE’s responses and materials. Their explanation of the 100% pass rate of their human rights checks was that companies unlikely to pass simply do not apply. We pushed back on this, expressing our worry that the checks cannot be sufficiently rigorous if they allow grants to go to weapons manufacturers who export their products to countries committing human rights violations. SE could really only repeat that they do not support the manufacture or development of munitions, which was one good thing to hear, though we made clear that we had concerns about (a) how even ring-fenced funding is still supporting a company with human rights risks around the use of its products and (b) whether such companies are genuinely in need of public money, especially when a transition to green industries is so urgent.

SE’s position was that they focus on diversification, moving away from the core arms business, and that they are only ever a minority funder in projects and that the company needs to invest significantly more than SE does. They pointed out that most public financial support for arms companies comes from the UK government.

In terms of helping businesses to transition to the type of industry needed for a green economy, SE explained that they are committed to the transition and are actively contacting businesses involved for example in manufacturing, to let them know about support and opportunities to be manufacturing components for offshore wind. All companies that receive SE support are expected

to have a net zero action plan. So far so good, and we were glad to know that SE are helping companies to move in the right direction, but we'd have liked to see more ambition! A key point for us was that the 'net zero' applies only to 'operational' emissions – SE conceded that their criteria might lead to perverse results where a company developing vital renewables innovations in a carbon-intensive way would fail their 'net zero plan' requirements, whereas a company producing high-emissions products by a low-emission method, would pass. We pointed out that in the case of arms companies this is a huge concern: 'operationally' their manufacture may be getting towards net zero, but the downstream emissions from use of their products is devastating both on a humanitarian and environmental level. But it became clear that SE see this as a governmental and international challenge rather than one that they can engage with themselves.

So – interesting and informative, but it's clear that there is still some more advocacy which can be done requesting the government to give direction in the area of funding companies which produce arms. We have written also to the Business Minister Richard Lochhead and although his reply did not leave many openings, we feel there are certain aspects such as more meaningful human rights checks which we can pursue with help from our friends at CAAT.

A final point of interest perhaps is the broader SNP/Scottish context. We mentioned the issues raised with SE when we wrote to Kate Forbes to congratulate her on becoming Deputy First Minister. She recognised our historic Quaker concerns on this. She was clear that the support was not for the manufacture of munitions, but rather focused on helping firms diversify their activities and technologies. However, she did highlight that the SNP's view from their recent independence conversation paper is that they want to develop a force capable of both defending Scotland and its people, but also which meets the international obligations required of us as a member of NATO. That, she says, will require the presence of a defence manufacturing footprint in Scotland [from which we infer that public funding of such companies is perceived to be necessary]. She specifically highlighted her view that "the current instability, both globally and in Europe in the wake of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine underlines [the need for] that commitment". The same point has been made to us by trade ministers.

The commitment of governments to support their arms industries is made all too clear in a new CAAT report which Friends may be interested to see: [From Revolving Door to Open Plan Office](#). We're examining this report for Scotland-relevant aspects to bring into our continued advocacy on these questions. The issue is ever more concerning as UK components and weapons are put to use in catastrophic conflicts around the world.

### **'Time for Reflection' on peace, in the Scottish Parliament**

You may already have seen that Martin Mansell, a Glasgow Friend who is

much missed by PEWG, having served a heroic 3 triennia with the group, led Time for Reflection in the Scottish Parliament on 28th November 2023, giving his reflection on Peace. You can watch it via this link:

<https://www.scottishparliament.tv/meeting/time-for-reflection-november-28-2023>

### **Working together to speak out**

Working within the parameters of the devolved powers of the Scottish government means that on international issues - such as arms sales – we are limited on what we as PEWG can usefully raise. But on Palestine, for example, we work closely with Christian Aid Scotland and would strongly commend their work and Just Peace resources; we try to ensure that these are made known to Scottish Friends. We are indebted also to other allies such as CAAT Scotland to inform us in our work. And of course we draw great strength from being part of Quakers in Britain whose statements and actions for peace we can all support, whether in communication with our MPs or in encouraging our MSPs to call on the UK government to make peacebuilding – as a genuine form of security! - a driving motive in their policy.

To ask about PEWG's work on peacebuilding or to sign up to receive an occasional newsletter providing opportunities for your own political engagement on PEWG's discerned priorities, please email our PEO [sarahk@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sarahk@quaker.org.uk)



Photograph 9: Somewhere (could be anywhere!) in Hyndland, Glasgow.

## 6 Community Matters

### 6.1 Human Rights for Palestinians Susan Mitchell, East Scotland AM

I was privileged to listen to representatives of Christian Aid partners from Israel, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory when they visited Scotland on Wednesday 19 March 2025. It was surprising to learn that these four Palestinians met for the first time in Scotland being unable to meet together in the Middle East. Hearing personal stories from four different perspectives emphasised the hardships and complexities of the ongoing situation. Although each speaker was here representing an NGO, the views reported here are their individual ones.

Leila El Ali, the Executive Director of Association Najdeh, a development charity that works with Palestinian women and children refugees in Lebanon, is herself a refugee living in a refugee camp in Lebanon; Dr. Hassan Jabareen, the General Director of Adalah, The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, is also a lecturer at Tel-Aviv University; Peter Nasir, General Secretary of EJ-YMCA (The East Jerusalem Young Men's Christian Association), which is a Palestinian community-based organisation working to empower youth and communities, has fragile residency rights in East Jerusalem but no citizenship; and Ahmed Sourani, the Coordinator of Gaza Urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP), left Gaza in 2023 and since then has not been allowed to return to be with his family there. Each of them spoke

Leila spoke of life in the refugee camps, established more than 70 years ago by international and host countries supported by UNWRA. Refugees have no rights and there is no freedom of movement. The recent cuts to UNWRA and USAID funding have been devastating for local NGOs like Association Najdeh. Bank charges make it challenging to support the poorest and now, if you are over 60, you are not entitled to open heart surgery should you need it. Association Najdeh advocates for the right to work, and now, since the cut to UNWRA for basic services; Social Workers and Psychologists offer psychosocial support for those displaced outwith the camps. Her plea was for refugees to be given citizenship.

Hassan is an impressive human rights lawyer who set up the legal centre for Arab minority rights 30 years ago when the government in Israel was more favourable towards Palestinians. Now, Hassan told us, there is the most racist right wing government ever. Have a look at the Adalah website and you will find a list of all the laws that diminish Palestinian citizens rights in Israel. Since this recent war all Palestinians are seen as the enemy and their lives are oppressed with no right to language or heritage. There is no equality - Israel is not a state for all its citizens although Iran and Saudi Arabia are. Working for Adalah he has to use a strategic approach with clever arguments to find cases where there is a hope of winning. This is not easy in a setting

where family reunification is not allowed, villages are unrecognised allowing demolitions to occur but he has had some success with the return of bodies to their families for burial - all Abrahamic faiths respect this right but Israel has been holding on to bodies to use in bargaining with Hamas. In view of all the injustices of the current situation it is perhaps not surprising that the crime rate amongst Palestinian Israelis is one of the highest in the world, second only to central America.

Peter is a Christian tracing his ancestors back 1700 years. He joked that if his ancestors had not converted we would not have Christianity. 25% of Palestinians are Christian and the Palestinian YMCA was founded in 1948 by some Palestinians returning home from London. It works in 56 communities across the West bank and aims to build spirit, mind and body - but gyms and swimming pools are not enough. Other support is needed and Christian Aid has helped EJ-YMCA develop the methodology for their support programmes, for psychosocial rehabilitation of children who have been detained and work with women's protection and empowerment.

Peter gave examples of his own family's experience of detention. 'Administrative detention' is arrest without due process - his cousin was arrested just because she was in a dance group. He told a harrowing story of the arrest in a dawn raid and subsequent torture in prison, of his 15 year old cousin for having banged the boot of a car with his fist. After pressure from his family he was eventually released to house arrest but not allowed to go to school. The conviction rate in these military courts is 99.4% - that is only 6 in 1000 not convicted - and arrests can be made from the age of 4. Children from the age of 12 are treated as adults and have no representation in court from either parents or lawyers. Peter believes in the right of Palestinians to be treated equally, to refuse to be second class citizens, or to be treated like animals as they are made to feel from birth. He believes people are inherently good but there is a need to work hard to stop children hating. He is pleased that his own daughters are able to attend the Friends School in Ramallah.

Ahmed described how he was physically with us but mentally and emotionally he was with his family in Gaza. His organisation works with five partners building and supporting much needed community initiatives such as: supporting local urban farmers, home gardens, safe spaces for women and children, vaccination of children, supporting women, children and older people, managing social disputes and in general building capacity and resilience of local communities. Urban farming and home gardens are a vital part of food provision in Gaza.

The principles of this work include respect, peace, love and justice where diversity is seen as a source of power.

Asked by the audiences what we can do to help the speakers came up with these actions

1. Speak truth to power by asking MPs and MSPs to:
  - Press for human rights for Palestinians in Israel.
  - Ask the government to press the Israeli government to freeze the law stopping UNWRA for the sake of human dignity.
  - Give refugees citizenship
2. Campaign for human rights
3. Give support and solidarity for local NGOs
4. Use social media to press Palestinian case

The YMCA has an Olive Tree Campaign you can support here.

Thank you to our allies Christian Aid for arranging for their partners to come to the UK and share their experience with us. Sadly Peter Nasir said that the most disappointing aspect of the trip was a meeting with government officials at Westminster.



Photograph 10: Looking towards Crianlarich from Cruach Ardrain.

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## 6.2 Forest Discovery Week

### David O'Donoghue, Monkstown Meeting

Anyone who's ever bitten into a bar of Cadbury's chocolate will have an affinity with George Cadbury who inherited the sweet-toothed empire from his father in 1861. At the end of the 1800s Cadbury was living in a mansion called Woodbrooke in Bourneville near Selly Oak, Birmingham.

After retiring in 2017, I got to know the big house when doing voluntary work there as a Friend in Residence (FiR). As such, I was part of a four-strong team ensuring a Quaker presence and undertaking many duties from preparing the Quiet Room for morning worship to overseeing the evening Epilogue.

The work also included giving half-hour tours of the house. My favourite part of being a guide was to explain that Cadbury had to leave his home in 1903 because it was too small for him, his second wife and a growing family (including many children from his deceased first wife). Conveniently, George had an even bigger mansion, the Manor House in nearby Northfield, and thus Woodbrooke became a Quaker study centre.

By the time I got there five years ago there were no long-term resident students, but Woodbrooke had evolved into a bustling 80 bedroom premises. The enterprise ran at almost 100% occupancy all year round and numerous activities were catered for, not all of them Quaker-related. The FiRs' office was always busy with people dropping in to see if we could solve problems such as lost phone chargers or train timetables. An elderly lady said she could not sleep without a proper feather pillow, could I help? Yes of course I could. A dash to the linen room upstairs and a clean pillow case sorted things out.

During numerous trips back to Woodbrooke I met an astonishing array of people. One who remains in my memory was as blind lady who had worked as a professional harpist before retirement. She was fun to chat to at supper time.

A gentleman I met at breakfast was availing of Woodbrooke's B&B facilities so he could have a cardiac check-up at the nearby Queen Elizabeth hospital.

Sadly, Woodbrooke closed its doors on 31 October 2023 – a victim of the Covid lockdown and high maintenance costs. The future of the buildings and ten-acre gardens is now in the hands of the Bourneville Village Trust.

Whenever I think of my time there, the memories come flooding back. There was Denis the Woodbrooke tabby who stretched out along the patio on warm summer mornings. When the sun got too hot he'd retire to a corrugated structure around the corner to rest in the cool shade. Denis was the opposite of a cat on a hot tin roof and knew his patch well.

Then there was the man who arrived one evening seeking a room for the night. I checked him in at the reception desk and as I handed over his key he told

me his wife had thrown him out for drinking too much. He then asked if we served drink in the bar, but I had to explain: ‘This is a Quaker establishment, so there’s no alcohol.’ He looked downcast and went off to his room. I looked out for him at breakfast but he was nowhere to be seen. I wonder what became of him.

Some of Woodbrooke’s activities will continue, including online tuition and face-to-face courses at locations around Britain. And no doubt George Cadbury would be content that things are still ticking over even if his old home has closed down.



Photograph 11: Ben Cruachan and other hills from the summit of Beinn Eunaich.

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### 6.3 Responding to complexity?

#### Robin Waterston, East Scotland AM

In July I attended Britain Yearly Meeting in London, my first in person for many years. It was a significant event, marked by difficult main sessions and some uplifting preparation meetings. It has taken me time to recentre myself.

I took part in a group session introduced by Tim Ashworth on Consensual Honesty. He asked how we share deep feelings in our Meetings. How do we handle disagreements? He urged us not to shy away from complexity. We have tools to support us, including threshing meetings.

Back in the large Meeting Room, three main sessions allowed a substantial consideration of issues around proposed structural change within Britain Yearly Meeting. A number of reservations and worries were expressed initially, with some clear opposition. But with skilful clerking and extra time we were able to reach unity. We acknowledged complexity and risks, and accepted the principles for change that were before us.

On the Monday morning, the topic was Speaking and Living with Integrity. I found this a strange and frustrating session. Its purpose was unclear. We were asked what difference past Minutes had made, focussing on Climate Change (2011), Antiracism (2021/2022) and Welcoming Transgender Friends (2021). The session felt rushed and unfocused. Many Friends were still waiting to be called when the session ended. There was little engagement with complexity. Some of the frustration boiled over at the end when a Friend called out that she felt silenced. She was given time to speak, and she spoke of ministry not being heard, of the impact of ideologies on Friends who may be struggling with gender identities. She asked that ministry on this be understood to come from a place of deep compassion, not phobia.

My thoughts continue to revolve around questions of sex, gender and identity. There are important issues here of social policy, social pressures and human relationships. These give rise to strong opinions and highly charged emotions, often amplified by the baleful influence of social media. What, for example, can we learn from the Cass Review into services for young people experiencing distress about their bodies? What does the resignation of the transgender CEO of the Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre tell us about the need for safe spaces for women? Quakers in Britain have not handled this well. Meeting have not been given support in discussing these topics. We seem to fear the emotions and the complexity. But we will never achieve better understanding without open discussions. And our aspiration to welcome gender-diverse people in our Meetings will remain superficial.

Serious mistakes have been made at senior staff level. In July 2023 a statement was issued from Friends House including the sentence “Quakers believe that gender and sexuality are sacred gifts”. There is no discerned basis for

this as it applies to gender. So I asked for an investigation by Trustees. My complaint was upheld and in January the sentence was formally withdrawn. But no announcement was made, so a misleading impression about Quaker belief is still out there. I remain concerned that such a mistake could have been made.

At Yearly Meeting I also attended a thoughtful preparation session introduced by Friends in London on work carried out over several years on issues of sex and gender. They had organised a series of discussions on the theme of *To Thine Own Self Be True*. They had deliberated at length and in considerable detail on many aspects of this. They showed that strong feelings and significant disagreements can be held in love, in an atmosphere of respect and deep listening. Their work resulted in an agreed Epistle, available at <https://londonquakers.org.uk/ttosbt>. It deserves careful study. We were told the task of listening and searching will continue.

London Friends have shown that with care and thoughtful planning we can be open and honest with each other on these contentious issues. I hope that we will follow this good example more widely, hopefully with support from Quaker Life, in the spirit of kindness and truth. In the words of the final YM Epistle, “we need to find kinder ground for our disagreements”.



Photograph 12: Sunrise, Loch Ossian.

## 6.4 The peace testimony is well out of date

### Margaret Roy, West Scotland AM

It may have been adapted since it was first conceived in the reign of Charles II and the UK has not been active militarily since 1945. Oh yes, we have been in Aden, Korea, the Gulf, and the Falklands to name a few, but not in our own country. Northern Ireland? Of course there is the Arms Industry!

As it stands our Peace Testimony is witnessed in our activities as peacemakers in nefarious conflict zones, for example as negotiators and companions. And I am sure others will think of more examples.

Yet, since WWII there has never been a day's peace without armed conflict in the world. When it was written in 20xx *Our Bodies, Their Battlefield* described 14 armed conflicts in the world at that time. This book sets out to describe RAPE as a weapon of war, a different kind of 'armed' conflict seldom focussed on by CAAT & co. And while the Gaza/Israel conflict goes on about the numbers of children killed, it seldom mentions what is happening to the women in Gaza often giving birth in unhygienic conditions without medication, and often subject to sexual abuse. It seems forgotten that that conflict started with a planned invasion of Israel targeting civilians at a music festival and families on Kibbutz – openly with the intent to rape and even filming it. Not mentioning there are still over 100 civilian hostages more than a year later. In Sudan women are afraid to go out to find bread because they are openly raped by gangs of militia on the streets. Women fleeing Ukraine will talk openly of sexual abuse.

How do we respond to all this? Frustration, despair, hopelessness. Whilst others ignore it as 'somewhere abroad'.

What do we need to pay attention to?

I would content that in all this the key factor is VIOLENCE.

In Scotland in 2022/23, there were 61,934 incidents reported of domestic abuse and 6,257 hate crimes., many of the latter involving 'verbal abuse' rather than physical. Does that matter? See Police Scotland crime figures. 'Mary Howden, coordinator of Women's Rights Network Scotland said there were 7,874 rapes, attempted rapes and sexual assaults last year with women overwhelmingly the victims. On average one woman is killed every 45 days in Scotland with 17 homicides last year'. – Sunday Post 27th October 2024. That is now at time of writing 24, more than double the figures in percentage terms relative to those of England and Wales.

How is crime different from war?

Violence is part of human nature. It is a necessary part of our desire to survive. However, it becomes unnatural in a patriarchal economic system based on status as possessions, creating a hierarchy of haves and have-nots where

inequality leads to fear, exploitation and injustice through competition for 'scarce' resources. Violence and coercion is used to support a structure of privilege.

Fear and frustration are usually at the root of violence. Violence is a failure to come to terms with reality. The world is not organised according to our desires. That does not mean we have to accept injustice and inequality. It means we have to develop the skills to cope and/or to change the world and to deal with our emotions. What does love call us to do? Never to turn the tables and ourselves become the perpetrators. Love is more than an emotion. As a gift of the Spirit it brings understanding leading to unity, to see the Creative Spirit moving in all.

Where are the skills and how do we develop them? How do we live non-violently?

In no way is it easy or even 'natural' in our patriarchal economic system of hierarchy. Ubuntu is more than community. In a short cut I could send you to AVP, Alternatives to Violence Project, long espoused by Quakers. Perhaps we could engender a campaign to see workshops in ALL local meetings, or Area Meetings at the very least?

However, we are a religious society and I would want to draw your attention to the Lamb's War of Early Quakers such as James Naylor and Margaret Fell. Paul in the Bible talks of the gifts of the Spirit if we can turn away from Caesar's world to Love, caring for each other, co-operation. I would add belonging, participation and integration valuing individual difference. Early Quakers spoke of the need to turn inwards where the Light would guide us. The work for the 'Kingdom' is within as well as without to create a better world. It starts within. It starts with each one of us.

The little child has to learn to accommodate its desires within the community's needs, starting with the family.

It boils down to values. What is important in life? What are we prepared to spend energy on? How do we resolve our inner conflict and frustration? The Psychotherapist would ask, "where is the dissonance?" How do we accept our limitations? What does a flower need to blossom?

When does the urge to violence arise? When do we blame others and project our frustrations to the belittlement of others?

How do we recognise and own our own Self?

Violence is an expression of our inability to deal with feelings that arise within.

Here is where the Peace Testimony needs to work today, the Lamb's War within.

Love starts with acceptance of Self. Is Peace a rediscovery of the Soul? Is Soul connection and harmony with Reality, a spiritual path.

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Photograph 13: Glen Rosa from Fionn Choire, Arran.



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