

SESAME

Number 266: July 2026

AM at Kelso on 11 July/YEARLY MEETING: YM Epistle; JYM Epistle; G. Fox at YM 1658; Lectures; Impressions/Middle East crisis: the FCDO view/Concerns of the Day: Peace/Climate Justice *news*/Experiment with Light/Wiston Weekend/LM changes at F.&P., P.&M. and (during the Festival) at C.E./Challenging Re-Armament a letter to Keir Starmer/ Quakers Yard Revisited/Book of Discipline *update*/Spiritual Reviews/A Trip to Loch Tay/AM minutes, April/ &c.



The river in spate at the Falls of Dochart – see page 55.

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SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND AREA MEETING

The next Area Meeting will be on Saturday 11 July, starting at 11.00 am, at the Quaker Meeting House, Abbey Row, Kelso TD5 7JF, and online. All associated with Quakers in South East Scotland are welcome.

Sara Davies
Clerk

DRAFT AGENDA

1. Worship and introductions
Elders: Joyce Guthrie and John Harris in the room
2. Minutes of the meeting of 13 April 2026
3. Matters arising from previous meetings
 1. *Policy on expenses for Quaker witness*
 2. *Quakers in Scotland*
4. Trustees
 1. *Annual Report and Accounts*
5. Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House Management Committee
 1. *Draft options paper on the sale of alcohol during the Fringe let of Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House [see page 4]*
6. Membership matters
 1. *Report on membership visit*
 2. *Resignation*
 3. *Tabular statement enquiries*
7. Appointments
 1. *Nominations*
 2. *Clerking team*
 3. *Yearly Meeting Representatives finishing dates*
 4. *Released from service*
 5. *For information*
 6. *Young Adult Representative(s)*
8. Matters from local meetings
 1. *Falkirk & Polmont – Cladhan Hotel witness*
 2. *Central Edinburgh*
 - 2.1 *Steve Tilley Memorial minute*
 - 2.2 *Scottish Refugees New Scot map*
 - 2.3 *Storytelling workshop*
 - 2.4 *The People's Emergency*
film showing at Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House
 - 2.5 *Sylvia Marshall Bequest Fund support for research on our Scottish Quaker ancestors' role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade*
 - 2.6 *Spiritual Review – see page 37*

3. *South Edinburgh*
 - 3.1 *Spiritual Review – see page 46*
 - 3.2 *Meeting with elected representatives*
9. **Outreach and Reports – and appendix to follow**
 1. *Living the Vision, Growing our Future! Workshop, 30 May 2026, & Wester Hailes meeting*
 2. *Peace Tree replanting and Meeting for Worship for Peace in Princes Street Gardens – report and engagement*
 3. *Doors Open Day Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House 26 September – volunteers*
 4. *Revision of the Book of Discipline – report* [see page 34]
 5. *John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust Annual Report 2025* [see also page 55]
 6. *Enquirers' event 3 October Perth*
 7. *Reports on Yearly Meeting – Sesame* [see page 13]
10. **Proposed dates, times and venues for Area Meeting in 2027/8**

<i>Tuesday 12 January</i>	<i>19:00 – 21:00</i>	<i>Edinburgh QMH</i>
<i>Saturday 10 April</i>	<i>all day</i>	<i>hosted by Central Edinburgh LM</i>
<i>Monday 21 June</i>	<i>19:00 – 21:00</i>	<i>Edinburgh QMH</i>
<i>Saturday 25 September 2028</i>	<i>all day</i>	<i>hosted by Portobello & M'burgh LM</i>
<i>Monday 10 January</i>	<i>19:00 – 21:00</i>	<i>Edinburgh QMH</i>
11. **Closing minute**

PROGRAMME FOR THE AFTERNOON

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 13:00-14:00 | Lunch |
| 14:00-15:20 | Afternoon session led by Kelso Local Meeting
<i>Our Friends offer three activities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guided architectural walk around Kelso • A sound journey for up to 10 people who can also climb stairs and get on and off the floor • Poetry and readings led session– <i>please bring your selection</i> |
| 15:20 – 15:30 | Closing session |
| 15:30 – 16:00 | Tea and cakes and departures |

Next Area Meeting: Saturday 3 October, all day at Falkirk & Polmont

Berwick-upon-Tweed Meeting

Meeting for Worship is held at **4.30 pm** on the **Second Sunday** of each month, normally at St Aidan's Hall, Church Street, Berwick upon Tweed, TD14 1DX. Refreshments are available beforehand from 4.00pm. For more information, please contact quakersinberwick@outlook.com.

Sale of Alcohol at Edinburgh Meeting House

In considering the proper use of their meeting houses, area meetings should be sensitive to the feelings of the worshipping community, whose members may object to the introduction of alcoholic drinks onto the premises or to other practices by other users of the meeting house. Hiring policies in respect of particular premises should be agreed between area meetings and local meetings, and conditions made clear to prospective users.

Quaker Faith & Practice, 14.17

The Meeting House Management Committee (MHMC) asks Area Meeting to agree to a trial of the sale of alcohol by our current Fringe partner company, C Venues, under their own licence during their let of the whole building during Fringe operations in August 2026.

We are asking for this trial on behalf of C Venues who have been using the Meeting House as a performance venue for the last two years and will be again this year (and hopefully in the future). Fringe production companies struggle to break even, and with rising costs, C Venues are likely to lose money on our venue this year without a bar. It affects them twice – they could make more money selling drinks, but they are also finding that many performers don't want a dry venue, so they have been struggling to fill their schedule.

MHMC supports this trial for three reasons:

- Our professional managers have a responsibility to support our customers' needs.
- The income from the Fringe is a significant contribution to our own financial viability. No other production companies have been interested in hiring the Meeting House without being able to run a bar. Long-term, it is unclear if even C Venues will continue without some alcohol sales.
- We also recognise the value of the Meeting House in supporting the arts.

Managers and MHMC will work with C Venues to promote Quaker messaging around moderation and the avoidance of harm as a condition of the trial.

If AM discerns that this trial can go ahead, Managers and MHMC will report on the outcome and give feedback on this trial at Area Meeting in October.

Rachel Fitzgerald
on behalf of Meeting House Management Committee

Arrangements for Meeting for Worship are affected by the let to C Venues – see page 23. The AM Library will also be inaccessible during the time that they are occupying the building.

THE EPISTLE FROM BRITAIN YEARLY MEETING

*Held at Friends House, The Frontier Centre in Northamptonshire,
and online, from 1 to 4 May 2026*

To Friends around the world

Loving Greetings to Friends everywhere.

Gyfeillion annwyl ym mhobman, anfonwn atoch ein cariad a'n cyfarchion.

Battered by the certainty of some of those around us, we seem to live in a world polarised by conflict and fear. The world around us appears even more frightening and unstable than it did last year, and yet we experienced deep joy at being able to come together.

Almost 2,000 Friends registered in advance for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) May 2026, including 100 children and young people at Friends House and at the Frontier Centre in Northamptonshire. Over 600 registered online and almost 400 attended for the first time.

We gathered around the themes:

What unites us as a spirit-led community in a divided world?

As a Spirit-led community, how can we handle conflict well?

We heard about overwhelm and helplessness, and a feeling that what we each are able to do is not enough: our hearts are resonating with the cry of the earth and the earth's people in pain.

A Friend shared their experience of the recent Earthcare Gathering where they came to understand that listening and upholding the witness of others is an important Quaker ministry. The Salter Lecture investigated the multiple moral catastrophes in the Middle East. We must work for "the just and equal and safe future where every life is precious and dignity belongs to everyone". The Recording Clerk summarised recent work relating to the right to protest in the United Kingdom.

Change, which can bring a sense of bereavement, as well as renewal, is coming to Quakers in Britain. We enacted structural changes to BYM. As we laid down Meeting for Sufferings after 350 years, we heard the Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Meeting for Sufferings and the many changes it weathered in its lifetime. We feel excited about the evolving landscape and look forward to the next session of BYM in Manchester and online in July. The draft of our new book of discipline will be with us in November, with a variety of resources to help us contribute towards a further draft, which will make it our own. We are reminded that the book itself is not our faith, but that unmediated access to the divine is the most important thing for British Quakers. We became aware that our spiritual language over the weekend showed a return to our roots. Maybe we are becoming more comfortable with living with the tension between theistic and other language. We shared a greater willingness to hear the meaning which underlies our words.

In the Swarthmore Lecture we were reminded that we are still living with fundamental and productive tensions which have existed since the beginning

of Quakerism.

We have heard from a minute of Junior Yearly Meeting that we need to hold differences tenderly and distinguish between acceptance, which comes as a result of being authentically yourself, and belonging, which is the result of shared values. Our children's and young people's groups worked on co-operative artwork on bridge-building and led us in singing "Building Bridges" in all-age worship on Sunday.

We feel in our bodies the pain of conflict. Embodiment can also sometimes be how the Spirit convinces us of the way forward.

We need to let go of certainty, the certainty that we know the answer. We need to let go of the outcome, and let the Spirit move: Friends who were in Friends House meeting room will long remember the improvised cheerful hymn-singing when the Zoom sound failed. Can we be open not only to this kind of gentle wind, but also to the storm that sweeps through and blows down trees, leaving room for new seeds to sprout? Let us hold spaces which are safe not just for the still small voice, but also for the wind, the storms, the power that makes us uncomfortable and which stirs us to action.

Do we still have the power to turn the world upside-down? Let it be so!

Signed in, and on behalf of, Britain Yearly Meeting
Fred Langridge, Clerk

You can see and hear Fred Langridge reading the Epistle during the closing session of YM at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veBivHL_W5w

THE EPISTLE FROM JUNIOR YEARLY MEETING

held at Pioneer Centre, Kidderminster, 3-7 April 2026

To all Friends everywhere,

We send greetings from the community of Junior Yearly Meeting 2026, held at The Pioneer Centre in Kidderminster from the 3rd to 7th of April. During our time together, we gathered as a community of 49 young Friends and 9 adults to explore the theme of:

"In a divided world, are we living our values to foster acceptance and belonging?"

We opened and closed each day in worship, using a variety of tools to help inspire our reflections. These included drawing, lights, music, poetry and a bonfire. Worshipping together allowed us to grow more comfortable sitting with uncertainty around open questions.

Sasha Lawson-Frost spoke to us about ministry and its many forms, encouraging us to reflect on what ministry truly is, where it comes from, and how it is expressed. We were challenged to think about whether ministry could ever feel angry or unsettling—if words come through us as vessels, is it still ministry when it carries anger, or does it become something else? We recognised that the deep ministry of young Friends can sometimes be overlooked by adults.

Our adult Friends shared their life experiences alongside the theme, offering a diverse range of talks that were both engaging and thought-provoking, grounded in community and our shared humanity. They encouraged us to be unapologetically passionate about what we love, reminding us that the ridiculous is something to be embraced—for our communities are richer when we bring our full, authentic selves, a fact that became evident in the community built at JYM.

We had plenty of opportunities to unwind throughout the weekend. The Pioneer Centre offered a range of outward-bound activities, including high ropes, abseiling, an aerial runway, indoor caving, and archery—and even the soggy raft builders found plenty of joy in the experience.

Free time was equally enjoyable and gave us space to relax and be ourselves. Our spaces were filled with games, music, singing, and even a dinosaur themed jigsaw. Alongside laughter, free time created opportunities for deeper conversations—moments that might not have found space within the main sessions, but were incredibly rewarding, both intellectually and spiritually.

A creative session run by Lorna McNeill allowed us to reflect on the theme in a more indirect way and the glass paint art was appreciated in the evening using light to project the artwork. This brought us together and united us using art as an expression of our core values.

Through telling stories, last year's Swarthmore lecturer, Emily Provance, challenged us to consider how two communities with the same core values can experience conflict – prompting us to question our preconceptions and listen more openly. We thought deeply about the concepts of love and empathy, recognising their differences, and considering how we could extend love and empathy to all people in the world. We struggled with the impossibility of meaningfully loving the entire population of the world but concluded that we should still strive to have this love, perhaps in a way that manifests as simply loving the humanity in people.

Paul Ingram reminded us that working for meaningful change is often not about the outcome, but about the process. It's about breaking down barriers that prevent meaningful conversations from happening. It struck us how much experience Paul has in bridging divisions. This inspired us to open up to other people and allow ourselves to be vulnerable, especially where there is a vast difference of opinion to overcome.

In our minute, we claim that *"there is communal strength to be found in mutual vulnerability and openness"*. By sharing our ideas freely, being open to having meaningful conversations and being vulnerable with each other, we were able to develop an overwhelming sense of connection between the Friends present at JYM.

This strong sense of belonging let us hope for a less divided world.

In friendship and peace,
Signed on behalf of Junior Yearly Meeting,
Ryn, Izzo, Rose.

Young Friends read the Epistle at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afvjZUM8aa0>

An Epistle to Friends

In May 1658, at the house of John Crook – probably his country estate, Beckerings Park, near Ridgmont, in Bedfordshire – “a General Yearly Meeting for the whole nation was appointed to be held;” it lasted three days, and “a matter of three or four thousand people were at it.” It was the first Yearly Meeting; Fox wrote of it: “[A] glorious meeting it was. The everlasting Gospel was preached, and many received it, which brought life and immortality to light in them, and shined over all.” Fox’s discourse to Friends was taken down and later circulated; the following is the condensed and abridged text in John Nickall’s edition of The Journal of George Fox (1975):

TAKE HEED of destroying that which ye have begotten ... That which calms and cools the spirit goes over the world and brings to the Father, to inherit the life eternal, and reaches to the spirits in prison in all. In the living unmovable word of the Lord God dwell, for whosoever goes out from the pure and ministers not in that, comes to an end; though he was serviceable for a time while he lived in the thing.

Take heed of many words; what reacheth to the life settles in the life ... If Friends do not live in the life which they speak of, so that they answer the life in those they speak to, the other part steps in, and so there comes an acquaintance, and that comes over them.

As every one is kept in the life of God over all that is contrary, then he is in his place, he doth not lay hands on any suddenly. For if he doth he may lose his discerning, and lay hands on the wrong part, and so let the deceit come near him and steal over; and it will be a hard thing for him to get it down. There is no one strikes his fellow-servant but first he is gone from the pure in his own particular. Then the Light which he is gone from, Christ, cometh and giveth him his reward. This is the state of evil servants. All the boisterous, hasty, and rash, beget nothing to God; but the life, which doth reach the life, is that which begets to God ...

Friends, be watchful and careful in all meetings ye come into. When a man is come newly out of the world he cometh out of the dirt. Then he must not be rash. For now when he cometh into a silent meeting, that is another state. Then he must come and feel his own spirit, how it is, when he cometh to those that sit silent; for he may come in the heat of his spirit out of the world. Now the others are still and cool, and he may rather do them hurt if he get them out of the cool state into the heating state.

There is a great danger to Friends travelling abroad in the world, except a man be moved of the Lord by the power of the Lord; for then keeping in that power, he is kept in his journey and in his work ... Though one may have openings when he is abroad, to minister to others, yet, for his own particular growth he must dwell in the life which doth open, and that will keep down that which would boast ...

Friends, come into that which is over all the spirits of the world, with that

ye may see where others stand, and reach that which is of God in everyone. Here is no strife, for he that goeth into strife and into contention is from the pure spirit ...

Now Truth hath an honour in the hearts of people that are not Friends. Friends being kept in the Truth are kept in the honour. But if any lose the power, they lose the life, they lose their crown, their honour, they lose the cross which should crucify them. And they crucify the just, and the Lamb comes to be slain ... The power of the Lord hath been abused by some, and the worth of Truth hath not been minded; there hath been a trampling on, and marring with your feet, and that abuseth the power ...

When any shall be moved to speak in a steeplehouse or market, turn in to that which moves and be obedient to it; that which would not go must be kept down ... It is a mighty thing to be in the ministry of the Lord God and to go forth in that. It is not as a customary preaching; but it is to bring people to the end of all outward preaching. For once ye have spoken the Truth to the people and they are come into the thing you speak of, many declarations of the life may beget them into a form ...

If any have been moved to speak and have quenched that which moved them, let them not go forth afterwards into words until they feel the power arise and move them thereto again. For the other part gets up, and if any go forth in that, he goeth forth in his own, and the betrayer will come in.

And all Friends, meddle not with the powers of the earth; keep out of all such things. ... Keep out of all jangling; all that are in the law come to the Lamb's power, who is the end of the law outward ... Christ, who was glorified with the Father before the world began, is the end of the law. This every particular must feel in himself.

John Crook was a former captain in the New Model Army and a J.P. (as well as a landowner who had done well by acquiring the property of royalists), but his standing with the Commonwealth regime was not enough to exempt him from harassment; three days after the meeting had dispersed, soldiers came to question him and to arrest George Fox, who was still staying at the house. Fox describes the episode:

And after the meeting was done I was walking in John Crook's garden and there came a party of horse with a constable but Friends were mostly gone. And I heard them ask what Friends were in the house and who was there, and one of them made answer and said I was there. And the soldiers and constables said I was the man they looked for, but they never came into the garden, but went into the house. And after many words that they had with John Crook and some few Friends in the house they went away in a rage and never minded me in the garden, the Lord's power so confounded them.

And so, after, I went into the house, and Friends were very glad to see them so confounded and that I had escaped them.

SWARTHMORE LECTURE

Tangled Roots: Navigating the Complex Legacy of Early Quakers

This year's lecture, by Stuart Masters, recently retired from being a tutor at Woodbrooke, focused on the faith and practice of the first Friends and explored how their legacy presents Quakers today with a range of challenging choices and dilemmas. The practice has been revived of having the printed version available immediately after the spoken lecture has been delivered; it can be ordered from the Quaker Bookshop at Friends House or online (<https://bookshop.quaker.org.uk>).

You can hear the lecture at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCIInrgAf_ck, and the background to it is discussed in three short videos which can be accessed at <https://www.stuartkmasters.com/swarthmore>.

On Saturday 4 July, a one-day event at Edinburgh Meeting House explored the main themes in more detail. **Sue Proudlove** writes:

In this workshop, Swarthmore Lecturer Stuart Masters led us through a day of engaging with the 'tangled roots' of early Quaker history, and the ways in which Quakerism has developed from them in subsequent centuries. He argued that although early Friends believed that they were acting solely in response to direct divine revelation, they were inevitably influenced by their social and political context, and their religious heritage.

From the beginning, Quakerism showed itself to be a movement that adapted and evolved. For example, Quakers quickly developed structures and internal discipline as they dealt with persecution and existential threats, and had become a much quieter and more 'respectable' group by the end of the 17th century.

Stuart also explained the longer-term changes (again reflecting social and political contexts) through quietist, evangelical and liberal Quakerism into a more pluralist present in British Quakerism – of course, Quakers have responded and adapted differently elsewhere in the world.

In groups throughout the day, around 20 Friends from SESAM and beyond engaged with questions suggested by the 'creative tensions' that Stuart describes in his lecture. For example, what do we feel about the charismatic responses of early Friends – and how would we react to people behaving like that in our meetings now? Early Quakers thought they were living in the 'end times' – how do we feel about the idea of a struggle between good and evil in the world today? We also looked at the transformation of early Quakers from a loosely organised, disruptive movement to an organisation that carefully managed its public image (and its members' behaviour). How does this relate to the perceived distinction between 'spiritual' and activist' Friends today?

So many knotty issues and tangled roots to tease out. I for one will be getting hold

of one of Stuart's books to explore further:

Tangled Roots: Navigating the Complex Legacy of Early Quakers,
Woodbrooke, 2026 (ISBN 978-1-7392260-3-9; price £10)

The Quaker Faith: Friends of Love and Truth,
T. & T. Clark, 2025 (ISBN 978-1-5381-8535-3; price £16.99)

SALTER LECTURE

The Middle East: A Moral Catastrophe?

Organised by the Quaker Socialist Society and named in honour of Ada and Alfred Salter, the Salter Lecture has in most years been an unofficial part of the Yearly Meeting programme since Tony Benn delivered the first one in 1996.

Rachel Shabi, a British-Israeli journalist, was the lecturer for 2026; she argued that that the war in Gaza is part of a wider decline in global norms. For us in the UK, it was "A shattering so seismic that it ripped through all our institutions as they supported or funded, obfuscated or misreported the intolerable violence that rained down upon the people of Gaza without mercy and without end."

Shabi was born in Israel to Iraqi Jews. She said the creation of the Israeli state cannot be separated from European antisemitism, a form of racism that drove Jewish communities to seek safety. However, "The Jewish national project that produced Israel was, from the perspective of Palestinians, unequivocally and unambiguously colonial."

The lecture, including the question-and-answer session that followed, can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AwaF2S8niI>. The full text is at

<https://quakersocialists.org.uk/2026/05/07/rachel-shabi-the-middle-east-a-moral-catastrophe-the-2026-salter-lecture/>

but Salter Lectures are not usually published in book or pamphlet form.

Rachel Shabi is the author of two other books:

Off-White: The Truth About Antisemitism,
Oneworld Publications, 2025 (ISBN 978-1836430766, price £10.99)

Not the Enemy: Israel's Jews from Arab Lands
Yale University Press, 2010 (ISBN 978-0-3001-6769-6, price £25)

BRITAIN YEARLY MEETING IN MANCHESTER

The first session of the 'continuing' Yearly Meeting will be on Saturday 18 July, held in Manchester and online: the in-person meeting is at Kings House Conference Centre, Sidney Street, Manchester, M1 7HB. Registra-

tion to participate on Zoom closes on 10 July, although if you registered for BYM in May, you do not need to do so again; for more information, see:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/ym/bookings>.

The session is expected to include:

- considering new ways into membership for those Quakers who are not part of a local meeting;
- an introduction to reparation for British Quakers' historical involvement in enslavement and colonialism;
- reports from Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and the Agenda Planning Committee;
- dates for Yearly Meeting sessions in 2029; and
- a meeting for worship to uphold Friends who are suffering for their faith.

The full agenda and other documents are available at:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/ym/documents>

The papers include eight testimonies to the Grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends, some of whom were no doubt known to some of us in South East Scotland, and a report from the Reparations Working Group, of which there is also a two-page summary. [See also below.]

Friends House produces an online newsletter called *Hope So!* giving updates on the work of Yearly Meeting and its committees; to subscribe, go to <https://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/newsletters/hope-so>. The current edition (Issue 5) has reports of recent meetings of the Central Committees of Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness, of an 'Away Day' for clerks, on 25 June, of the BYM Trustees' May meeting, from the BDRC [see Mary Woodward's article on page 34] and of updates to *Quaker Faith & Practice*, as well as a spotlight on nominations.

INVOLVEMENT IN SLAVERY

Friends are not alone in their discomfort at the role of their forebears in enslavement. At its General Assembly in April, the Church of Scotland formally apologized for its historical ties to transatlantic chattel slavery, admitting that members and officers previously profited from the slave trade and offered theological justifications for slavery. A report, with a link to the text of the apology, is here:

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/articles/church-grieved-beyond-telling-in-apology-for-historical-links-with-slavery>

For Harvard University, however, the issue is apparently still too difficult to address:

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2026/apr/18/harvard-university-antigua-slavery-history>

Britain Yearly Meeting 2026 – Impressions

Our WhatsApp Group of people attending BYM had eleven members this year, eight from Portobello & Musselburgh and three from other Meetings. We were asked for a brief reflection on the experience of attending – these are the responses received:

A privilege and very worthwhile experience attending Britain Yearly Meeting. Amazing and inspiring to be amongst more than a thousand Quakers of varying ages.

Just two of the highlights for me were the excellent Swarthmore lecture and also the brilliant Salter lecture.

Most impressive and inspiring to see the skills of the BYM Elders and also of the BYM Clerks and BYM Pastoral Friends.

Wade Robertson

THERE WERE many tears for me attending BYM for my first time, in my 25 years of being a Quaker. The relaxed concentration of being in business meeting session with over 1000 Quakers seeking – and finding – some truths, released my tear ducts because of joy and because of pain.

Singing 'Building Bridges' together at the invitation of these super insightful teenagers who reported their minute gave me the belonging that I yearn for amongst being a member of this spirit-led community. I really valued spending four days amongst what one Welsh Friend called "the whole Quaker banana continuum" as I felt our business method supported ourselves well.

Duncan Wallace

IN SATURDAY'S OPENING WORSHIP, a Friend spoke of the certainties she had had in her younger days, while now she is challenged by the certainties of others. This was a bit of a theme for the weekend: we need to be sure of some basics, but ready to listen to others even when what they say makes us uncomfortable.

Stuart Masters' Swarthmore Lecture lived up to my expectations: I find he always manages to make the experiences of early Friends relevant to my life today. His listing of four 'creative tensions' that have been with the Society, in all its manifestations, since the turbulent 17th century was insightful.

I spent Sunday afternoon raising my yellow hand on Zoom to be called to speak on how we handle conflict – to no avail. It was helpful to remember that the Clerking Team are following the leadings of the spirit when deciding whom to call ...

Sunday morning unprogrammed worship was distinguished by ministry in the form of song – not the Quaker hymn but a Count Basie blues, full of the spirit.

Alastair Cameron

P.T.O.

I WAS VERY IMPRESSED by the Clerks' ability to produce a minute from the range of ministry, and their handling of difficult moments of emotional tension in this very large group. It was interesting to hear the use of quite traditional biblical references and language, and even the claiming of some writings as 'Primary Texts': I did think that part of the point of Quakers is that the personal experience is the primary 'text' and the rest is to be used to support discernment. This is an interesting turn in Quaker practice, and troubled at least some who value the absence of such ideas about scripture: we will need to reflect on how to avoid our own Culture Wars.

I really enjoyed the Swarthmore Lecture, which was itself addressing the relationship between the Bible and early Quaker thinking.

I'm left reflecting on how important and helpful it can be to attend BYM, with the opportunity to tap into the currents of thought and practice across Britain. I attended BYM this year online which is for me is less satisfying than being there in person. I find it more difficult to sense the general feeling in the Meeting – and easier to be distracted! I would prefer to attend in person if I possibly can.

Chris Holman

THIS YEAR'S Britain Yearly Meeting felt busier than usual for me; attending all sessions, with tasks and meetings in between.

Apart from being busy, it was joyful, spiritual, moving, frustrating, heart-warming and truly awe-inspiring. I am very grateful to have been part of it.

I especially loved the spontaneous singing led by the BYM clerk when we lost the connection with our Friends online, and the programmed all age worship singing. I had goosebumps and tears in my eyes.

Cathy Holman

*[With thanks to **Chris Holman** for passing these on, and to the contributors.]*

Christian Aid News

Ebola Crisis Emergency Appeal

A new Ebola outbreak is spreading across the Democratic Republic of the Congo – one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies in the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared a public health emergency of international concern. Christian Aid Partners are already responding on the ground; for more on the crisis and how you can support them, see <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/ebola-emergency-appeal>.

The Debt Crisis

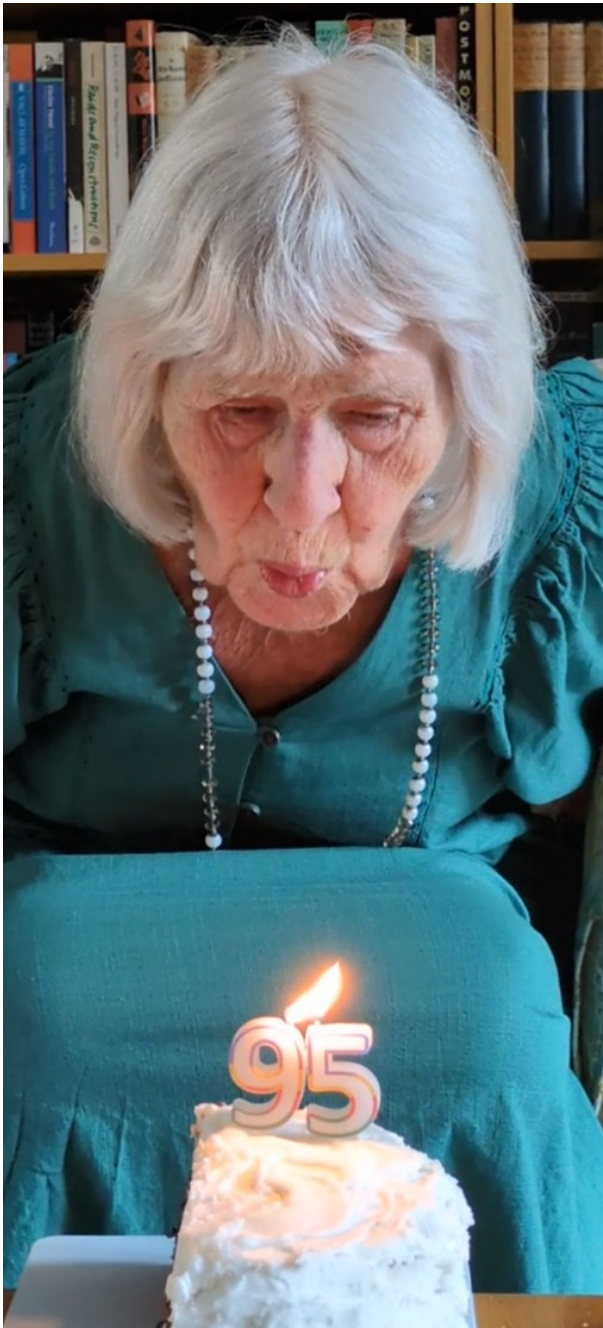
Across the global South, the financial and human impacts of the climate and debt crises are colliding to trap millions of people in poverty. In Kenya, 60% of government income is spent on debt interest; see the briefing at

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/restore-campaign-kenya-action-pack> and order the action pack.

Prayers for Peace in the Middle East

Christian Aid supporters pray together on the 24th of each month on Teams – meetings resume in September after the summer break.

There is more about Christian Aid's campaigns, events and resources at <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved-locally/scotland> and see **page 53** on the DEC appeal for Venezuela.



Rachel Frith celebrated her 95th birthday on 3 May. (Photo by Zac Norbash)

Recommendation: a book from the AM Library

Wrestling with the Angel by Tony Stoller

Since 1907, Swarthmore Lectures have been delivered at the time of Yearly Meeting with a twofold purpose: first, to interpret to the members of the Society of Friends their message and mission, and second, to bring before the public the spirit, the aims and fundamental principles of Friends. I have been reading the 2001 lecture, subtitled *Quaker engagement in commercial and public affairs*.

Tony Stoller observes that Friends have no difficulty engaging with education or healthcare issues but are wary of, or hostile to, commercial or political involvement, very different from his working life in newspapers, radio and retailing, and public administration in the regulation of broadcasting.

I am not sure I agree with all he says, and some things have changed in twenty-five years, but he is right that Quaker treasurers need the support of their meetings.

Rachel Frith

Concerns of the Day: Peace

ON WEDNESDAY 6 MAY, Central Edinburgh Local Meeting held a second 'Concerns of the Day' event, this time on the topic of peace. This series of events is open to all, and aims to use the Quaker business method to discern on a relevant topic, following some input from guest speakers. The speakers were Rachel Julian, Professor of Peace Studies at Leeds Beckett University, and Matthew Bittle, a Quaker Justice and Peace Advocate and mediator with the Centre for Good Relations. 46 were present, 8 of whom were known non-Quakers, and a mix of people contributed to the discussion.

Rachel started off the event, using her 15 years of academic experience in peace studies to give a well-rounded overview. She outlined four "steps to peace", as follows:

1. Making sure we build peace infrastructure. We need a culture of peace, and to teach the skills and knowledge associated with it. For example, there are 200 war museums in the UK but only one peace museum. Rachel emphasised the importance of solidarity and how we must focus on the long term.
2. We have to look for peace everywhere. Everywhere where there is violence, there are people working for peace. She used the example of Colombia, where there are 150 organisations working on protection through non-violent methods. We must go and look for the people working on these initiatives.
3. Think about and challenge the language we use around peace. Does the word "security" refer to military security or human security? Is the word "protection" just an excuse for armed peacekeepers? There are other ways of doing security, such as the women of South Sudan who have created community security projects. Power does not have to be top-down, but can be micro-relational and start at the bottom.
4. Peace is underpinned by non-violence, and challenges us to listen to people we disagree with. There is no 'us' and 'them', there is no 'other'. We are all connected.

Matthew's contribution was more personal, having grown up Quaker and trained as a lawyer. After a short period of silence, he expressed discomfort with the word peace, as it has multiple meanings in different contexts. He drew upon his own experiences working with displaced people in Palestine, and the uncomfortable dynamic between Palestinians and the IDF in multiple situations.

Like Rachel, he connected peace to power, saying there was a fundamental interdependence between the two. Through his current work as a mediator with the Centre for Good Relations, he has worked to create dialogue between opposing groups at the Cladhan Hotel protests against asylum seekers in Falkirk. He emphasised that the fear of the "other" was a major

factor at play here. Matthew serves on the Quaker Peace and Social Witness central committee, and asked what does a confident Quaker voice for peace look like? In his work, he is led by the idea of seeking that of God in everyone. We need to look for peace in our everyday, and build peace and justice into our daily lives.

Following the two speakers, we entered a period of discussion and discernment using the Quaker business method, which was chaired by organiser Juliet Henderson. There were many interesting contributions, including one from a Quaker who attended silent witness at the Cladhan Hotel. He said that things were getting violent and it was only because of the police presence that nothing happened. He said that as silent witnesses, they held the freedom to be peaceful because the state (the police) was willing to commit violence, and this felt conflicting. Another attendee raised that Costa Rica had decided to abandon its army and used the money saved for tourism and conservation. Others mentioned the peace that we have to build inside ourselves and how we live our 'faith in action', as well as the idea of hope. There are the seeds of peace in many places – how do we seek out those seeds and nurture them?

Overall, the event was illuminating and full of insight. The Quaker way of discerning worked particularly well with this topic, and by the end it felt almost like a Quaker meeting, despite the amount of people unfamiliar with Quakers present! Many thanks to Juliet for her excellent chairing and choice of speakers. The next event will be slightly different: a screening of *Becoming Benjamin Lay* – a documentary film chronicling the life of the radical 18th-century Quaker, dwarf, and abolitionist, and his uncompromising activism. It will be screened during Quaker week at 7.00 pm on Wednesday 7 October in the Meeting House.

Isla Whateley

Climate Justice and the Rule of Law – *recent news items*

THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY voted overwhelmingly in May to adopt a resolution that countries have a legal obligation to address climate change, following the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in July 2025 that states must prevent harm to the climate system, and that failing to do so could result in their having to pay compensation and make other forms of restitution. 28 countries, including India, Turkey and Nigeria, abstained, and eight – Iran, Israel, Liberia, Russia, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and of course the United States – voted against; but 141 were in favour, including the UK.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/may/21/un-vote-support-icj-world-court-climate-change-opinion>

THE ECOCIDE (Scotland) Bill fell at Stage 2 when the Scottish Parliament was dissolved on 8 April, and Monica Lennon MSP, who had intro-

duced it, was not returned in the Elections on 7 May. The legislation can be re-introduced in the new session, but the process has to begin again from the start, see <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/ecocide-scotland-bill>

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE on the insurance industry has been mentioned here before; although the knock-on effect of drought or flooding putting up the price of cocoa or bananas, and thus impacting inflation in the UK, is not how most of us would frame our concern, it is a consideration for the Bank of England.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/jun/28/rising-cost-insuring-against-climate-crisis-knock-on-effects-for-uk-economy>

YALE UNIVERSITY has, since 2002, produced an Environmental Performance Index, which ranks countries on climate change performance, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality, using 58 performance indicators across 11 issue categories. The 2024 report is at <https://epi.yale.edu/>; a preview of the 2026 one has been released to the *Guardian*, which details some of the highlights at

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/jul/08/climate-change-crisis-europe-us>

As in 2024, Estonia is ranked first; Luxembourg is second, and the UK third, up from fifth place in 2024. Japan (16th) is the only non-European state in the top 20. The US is down to 27th, and China is 129th: despite “huge progress” in developing its clean energy sector, it still derives 56% of its electricity from coal, and performs relatively poorly on its marine conservation and biodiversity stewardship.

A DURA, the owners of the Jackdaw gas field, development of which was stalled last year when the Court of Session ruled that permission to open it had been unlawfully granted, are lobbying the UK Government to allow them to continue, asserting that without it there will be an energy crisis this winter, a claim which the BBC reports is doubted by ministers:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdx78n4nkvyo>

The Institute for Government has produced an ‘explainer’ in the issues to be considered in respect of both Jackdaw and the Rosebank oilfield (also halted by the judgment in January 2025) – see

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/jackdaw-and-rosebank>

TRANSITION PLANNING 2026, the latest report From the TPI Centre at the LSE on decarbonisation strategies in oil, gas and mining, is here:

<https://www.transitionpathwayinitiative.org/publications/uploads/2026-transition-planning-2026-decarbonisation-strategies-in-oil-and-gas-and-diversified-mining.pdf>

It finds that “In the oil and gas sector, there is little clear evidence that companies plan to transition away from fossil fuels towards climate solutions at the required pace”; the war against Iran is encouraging development of fossil fuels – see

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/jul/07/big-oil-companies-profiting-fossil-fuel-global-climate-change>

Peace and Consciousness workshop: 17 October 2026

Jean Kenyon and Susan Kime are offering an all-day workshop on *Peace and Consciousness*, open to all, on Saturday 17 October, 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. It will be free of charge; lunch will be provided. It is important that all participants commit to the full day. Places will be offered on a first come basis. Jean and Susan share a long standing interest in consciousness, and, for this event, are linking peace to consciousness. The sessions will involve input from the literature of world-class physicists and philosophers, some of whom are making bold, significant and exciting contributions to the understanding of spirituality. There will also be experiential sessions and discussion with a little poetry and music. Details of how to register for the event will be sent out in September.

Woodbrooke Courses: August/September

Courses commencing and events taking place in July were listed in *Sesame* 265. Unless marked otherwise, events are online. It is necessary to book beforehand (at <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/our-courses/>) as places are limited. If a price is shown, it is the **standard** fee, and a **50 % discount** is usually available to participants aged 18–35. If a price is *not* shown, participants are invited to “pay as led”: there is a cost to Woodbrooke in putting on events and courses, and it is hoped contributions by those taking part will cover them.

The Editor welcomes participants' reports for possible inclusion in Sesame.

For bursary help, speak to a Pastoral Friend, or email sesamtreasurer@gmail.com.

Essentials of Quaker Eldership

Monday 10 August, 19:00-20:30 BST

Ruth Audus, Elize Sakamoto

Listening Through the Wisdom of the Body

Thursday 13 August, 19:00-21:00 BST

Althea Banda-Hansmann

Life Reflections

Sunday 23 August, 14:00-16:00 BST

Daniel Clarke Flynn

Hope as a Practice

£60

4 sessions, Tuesdays, 1- 22 September, 18:30-20:30
with a follow up session on Tuesday 24 November.

Ella Asheri,
Simonne Wood

Lifting Our Hearts Around Money

£48

5 sessions, Tuesdays, 1–29 September, 18:30-20:00 BST

Katie Barron

Essentials of Quakerism

£30

4 sessions, Wednesdays, 2–23 September, 19:00-20:30 BST

Wendy Hampton

Researching Reparations: Central England Area Meeting

Wednesday 2 September, 19:00-20:30 BST

Valerie Jenner, Andrew Packer

Enquiring Into: Being a Gathered People

Thursday 3 September, 19:00-21:00 BST

Rosie Carnall

- The Essence of Quaker Pastoral Care*** £60
4 sessions: Thursdays, 3–24 September, 18:30-20:30 BST Eileen Aird,
Elize Sakamoto
- The Birth Stories of Buddha and Jesus*** £36
2 sessions: Fridays, 4 & 11 September, 19:00-21:00 BST Benjamin Wood
- A Quaker Guide to Genesis*** £60
5 sessions: Mondays, 7 September – 5 October, 19:30-21:00 BST Josh Selfe
- Time Set Aside: An Individually Guided Retreat* [RESIDENTIAL]** £940
The Ammerdown Centre, Radstock, Somerset BA3 5SW
The retreat will begin at 17:00 on Monday 7 September Annique Seddon,
and end with breakfast on Friday 11 September. Timothy Peat Ashworth
- George Richardson Lecture: Quakers and Nazis: The Stories We Tell***
Tuesday 8 September, 19:00-20:30 BST David Harrington Watt
- Welcoming Difference: Neurodiversity*** £48
3 sessions: Tuesdays, 8–22 September BST Kate Fox, Wendy Hampton
- Comings and Goings: Modelling the Future of Quaker Membership***
Thursday 10 September, 19:30-21:00 BST Marion Penn, 'Ben' Pink Dandelion
- Essentials of Quaker Eldership***
Monday 14 September, 19:00-20:30 BST Ruth Audus, Elize Sakamoto
- Black Lives Matter: Challenging the School to Prison Pipeline***
Wednesday 16 September, 13:30-15:00 BST Edwina Peart, Tanya Hubbard
- Embodying Spiritual Wisdom Through Chant***
Thursday 17 September, 19:00-20:30 BST Paulette Meier
- The Gospel of Mary: A Friendly Study Group***
5 sessions: Thursdays, 17 September – 15 October, 19:00-20:30 David Curtis
- Margaret Fell: The Mother of Quakerism* [RESIDENTIAL]** £295
Glenthorne Guest House, Easedale Road, Grasmere, Ambleside, LA22 9QH.
This course is FULLY BOOKED – to be put on the waiting list, contact
Glenthorne – tel. 015394 35389 or email info@glenthorne.org.
- Quakers in Bolivia: A History to the Present*** £72
6 sessions: Fridays, 18 September – 23 October, 17:30-19:00 BST
Emma Condori Mamani
- Celebrating Times and Seasons As Quakers*** £60
4 sessions: Mondays, 21 September, 14 December, 15 March 2027, &
Monday 21 June 2027, 19:00-21:00 (UK time) Gill Sewell
- Spiritual Friendship Groups: A Practical Introduction*** £72
5 sessions: Mondays, 21 September – 19 October, 19:00-21:00 BST
Simonne Wood, Tanya Hubbard
- Challenging Traditional Quaker Histories: Quakers and Enslavement***
Tuesday 22 September, 19:00-20:30 BST Lily Chadwick
- Creating a Nonviolent World*** £120
6 sessions: Wednesdays, 23 September – 28 October, 19:00-21:15 BST
Özge Altinkaya, Jenny Tipping

Opening To Love: Contemplative Practices for Decolonising Spirituality £60

5 sessions: Thursdays, 24 September – 22 October, 19:00-21:00 BST

Althea Banda-Hansmann

Diversity and Paradox: Ancient Wisdom for Today

Tuesday 29 September, 19:00-20:30

David Curtis

Women's Silent Retreat, 17-19 April

I RECENTLY ATTENDED a Quaker women's silent retreat, organised through the thoughtful discernment of South Edinburgh local meeting. Participants came from four different local meetings, adding a quiet richness and diversity to the shared experience.

The retreat was held at The Bield, at Blackruthven, near Perth, and it proved to be a deeply nourishing and restorative place. From the moment we arrived, there was a palpable sense of care and gentleness that seemed to hold everyone present.

The setting itself is truly beautiful—a peaceful, well-kept building next to a walled garden where each invites quiet reflection. There is a swimming pool, a swing tucked into the landscape, thought provoking sculptures, a Japanese garden, and woods that encourage slow, mindful walks.

Nature feels very close here: hares, chickens, and deer make appearances, and a gentle stream runs nearby, with fields of cows and sheep stretching into the distance.

The food was simple, wholesome, and delicious—clearly prepared with thought and intention. It added to the feeling of being quietly nurtured without distraction or excess.

There's also an art room, which offered a space for expression when words were set aside. Like everything else, it was held in the same spirit of openness and calm.

What stood out most was the atmosphere—peaceful, deeply caring, and grounded. The staff created a space where you could truly rest and be yourself without pressure. One phrase shared during the retreat—"let the place love you"—captured the essence of the experience. And it did. In different ways, it touched each of us, inviting a depth of reflection that stayed long after the silence ended.

A truly special place for anyone seeking stillness, connection, and quiet renewal.

Katrina McCrea

One of the participants at the Retreat was enabled to attend by a grant from the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust – see page 55 for details of how to apply.

Wiston Weekend, 18-20 September

ALL FRIENDS AND ATTENDERS in Scotland are invited to attend the 2026 Quaker community building weekend at Wiston Lodge.

5.00 pm for 6.00 pm Friday 18 – 2.00 pm Sunday 20 September 2026 at Wiston Lodge, near Biggar, South Lanarkshire ML12 6HT.

Your talents and ideas are welcomed as this is really about sharing and deepening community. Join us to make joyful memories of friendship in this special place.

Last year we shared many activities: puppetry, brambling, dialogue poetry, a nature walk, climbing Tinto Hill, a Friday evening bonfire, with *Qi-gong* (Chinese meditation and exercise) after breakfast, and a Saturday evening ceilidh.

This year – with support from Quakers in Scotland and South East Scotland AM – we will offer some **Adventure Activities** led by skilled instructors for younger participants.

We have booked the whole place – all facilities in the Victorian Lodge, the cabins and the camping field. There is a plan of the buildings at <https://wistonlodge.com/facilities/> so you can get an idea where you would prefer to stay.

Bursaries: If cost is a problem, please ask one of your Local Meeting Pastoral Friends to send an email with details to either SESAM Treasurer or QiS treasurer so they can discuss your needs.

More information / Booking Form: <https://bit.ly/wiston26>

Questions? By email to QuakerWistonWeekend@gmail.com or contact Josh Green (details in the Book of Members).

Falkirk & Polmont Local Meeting – change of venue

Since January, the local meeting has again been gathering in Polmont, though its name is not being changed. It meets at 10.30 am every Sunday, at its former venue, now known as

Polmont Community Hub, Greenpark Drive, Polmont FK2 0TZ

Contact **Denise Marshall** if coming with children; **Anna Levin** for updates.

Portobello & Musselburgh L.M. – change of time

Since 1 July, morning Meeting for Worship on the second and forth Sundays in the month, at Bellfield, 16B Bellfield Street, Portobello, EH15 2BP, has been **half an hour earlier**, starting at **10.30 am** rather than 11.00. This also applies to the Children's and Young People's Meeting.

Evening meeting times are unchanged; *i.e.* on the first Sunday in the month, at **Bellfield** (*as above*), from 7.00 – 7.30 pm; and on the third, and, when there is one, fifth Sundays, at **The Hollies, 183 High Street, Musselburgh, EH21 7DE**, from 7.00 – 8.00 pm. There is no provision for children at the evening meetings. For more information, contact the co-clerks, **Robin Liebmann, Sarah Martín and Marian Willoner**, or go to:

<https://www.quakerscotland.org/portobello-musselburgh>

Central Edinburgh L.M. – changes during July/August

In late July and August this year, as in 2025, we will be leasing the Meeting House to 'C Venues' to run it as a venue in the Festival Fringe, 7-31 August. They will be using the Hall, the Meeting Room and the Bow Room as performance spaces, and they may run a cafe in the foyer. [*See also page 4.*]

PLEASE NOTE: from **Sunday 26 July to Sunday 6 September**, therefore:

- We will have a **reduced space** in the Meeting Room on Sundays for Meeting for Worship – a square of roughly two thirds of the room, as we had last August.
- 9.30 am Meeting for Worship will be **online only** between these dates.
- Following 11 am Meeting for Worship, teas and coffees will be served **in the Meeting Room itself**, rather than in the Hall.
- There will be **no Sunday lunch** available after Meeting.
- Midweek Meeting for Worship will **continue** throughout these dates; the exact timings will be confirmed nearer the time, and will be communicated in the Notices.

Silent Walking Vigil for Peace

Saturday 19 September 2026, 12.00 noon – 4.00 pm, Central London

Let's make a 'loud silence'.

We will walk in large numbers, calling for peace for all people and for our planet, showing solidarity and care for everyone impacted by violence, conflict and war.

Walk with us. Witness for peace.

Everyone who shares our hope for peace will be welcome to join us.

Sign up and find out more at <https://www.quakervigilforpeace.org>

The Crisis in the Middle East – the UK Government's view

On 4 March, in the week after the attack on Iran by Israel and the United States, the Northern Friends Peace Board wrote to Keir Starmer, commending his call for de-escalation, questioning whether the term 'defensive' can meaningfully be applied to bombing, and urging the UK government "to press for de-escalation as a matter of urgency and to encourage all involved to seek diplomatic means of bringing this outbreak of violence to an end as soon as possible." This reply, sent from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office is dated 24 April. – ED.

Dear Philip Austin,

Thank you for your correspondence about the crisis in the Middle East. We have set out in this letter the UK's policy response to a range of linked issues and hope you will find this information helpful in understanding how the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is seeking to influence positively the situation in the Middle East.

The UK condemns in the strongest terms the Iranian regime's appalling and reckless strikes against countries in the region. Such actions demand a united response to restore peace and security and prevent further escalation of the conflict.

Our priority is clear: to protect British nationals, support our allies, and prevent further escalation. The Prime Minister has welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire between the US, Israel and Iran as an important step towards de-escalation and restoring security and stability in the region. The goal must now be to secure a swift and lasting end to the conflict through diplomatic means, and the UK will continue to work closely with international partners in support of this effort.

The disruption to shipping routes in the region is already having real economic consequences, including for the United Kingdom. Further escalation risks higher energy prices, increased transport costs and additional pressure on household bills. As the Prime Minister has said, restoring freedom of navigation and economic stability is essential to protect British households and families from rising costs. We are working with all our allies, including our European partners, to bring together a viable collective plan that restores freedom of navigation in the region as quickly as possible.

The United Kingdom was not involved in the initial US and Israeli strikes on Iran. As the Prime Minister has said, that decision was deliberate and reflects our focus on taking decisions in the UK's national interest. The UK is taking proportionate and necessary measures, in line with international law, to support the defence of our allies and partners. This includes deploying military capabilities to the region and permitting the use of UK bases for defensive operations aimed at preventing further Iranian missile attacks and protecting civilian life.

The UK has been working internationally to support the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and to restore freedom of navigation. The Foreign Sec-

retary convened a meeting of over 40 countries from every continent, alongside key international organisations, demonstrating the strength of international determination to secure the Strait's immediate and unconditional reopening.

In parallel, more than 30 countries have now signed a UK-led international statement condemning Iran's actions and expressing readiness to contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait. We will continue to work with partners, including the shipping, insurance and energy sectors, to restore confidence in the route and ensure international trade and energy supplies can resume safely.

The UK's long-standing position remains that Iran must never be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon, and we urge Iran to:

- Cease its destabilising activity in the region
- Refrain from further strikes
- Return to a negotiated diplomatic solution

The US has requested permission to use British bases for specific and limited defensive purposes. We have taken the decision to accept this request to prevent Iran firing missiles across the region, killing innocent civilians, putting British lives at risk and hitting countries that have not been involved.

To be clear: the use of British bases is strictly limited to agreed defensive purposes. The UK has not joined US offensive operations. Our action is rooted in the principle of the collective self-defence of longstanding friends and in the protection of British lives.

We must not allow Russia to exploit events in the Middle East to escalate its war in Ukraine. Whilst global attention is rightly focussed on the situation in the Middle East, we must remain resolute in our efforts to ensure Ukraine has the support it needs to defend itself, and to ratchet up the pressure on Russia to achieve a just and lasting peace.

The future of Iran is a matter for the Iranian people. Our focus is on urging the Iranian authorities to ensure the Iranian people can exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms, without fear of violence and persecution.

It continues to be an extremely challenging and unsettling time for many across the Middle East. The UK condemns Iran's role in attempting to draw the region into a wider conflict. The Iranian regime has killed thousands of its own people and systematically and brutally suppressed dissent for years. We condemn these reckless missiles and attacks on their neighbours. This appointment suggests no change in direction from Iran.

The UK has maintained a heightened defensive posture for several months, deploying additional capabilities to the region throughout January and February. These include advanced radar, ground-based air defence, counter-drone systems, and additional F-35 and Typhoon aircraft. We continue to reinforce our presence to protect our people and partners.

The advanced air-defence destroyer HMS *Dragon* has been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean, and RFA *Lyme Bay* has sailed from Gibraltar to sup-

port maritime tasks if required. Since the start of the conflict, we have also deployed four additional Typhoons to Qatar to strengthen our operations and safeguard UK interests, and we have replenished air-defence missile stocks for our aircraft.

The situation is evolving rapidly, and we recognise the concern this is continuing to cause for British nationals. We have helped facilitate travel for British nationals across the region, including engaging commercial airlines, working with regional governments to open flight slots and chartering planes – seeking to prioritise vulnerable people.

As a result of this work, more than 100,000 British nationals have now returned safely to the UK. A dedicated 24/7 FCDO crisis response centre is operational to support British nationals affected and can be contacted on 020 7008 5000.

As the Prime Minister has said, the UK is taking decisions based on our national interest. We are acting to protect British lives, support regional stability and prevent the UK from being drawn into a wider war. We will not be dragged into wider escalation.

The UK is committed to the security of its allies and partners across the region. In anticipation of and response to the current crisis, we have strengthened our defensive measures in the Eastern Mediterranean, including deploying helicopters, Typhoons and F-35s, ground-based air defence systems and a destroyer, HMS *Dragon*.

The UK has not been involved in the strikes on Iran. We are deeply concerned by reports of civilian casualties including at a school in Iran and across the region. We are appalled by all reports of civilian deaths. Innocent civilians should never be caught in the crossfire. We continue to support efforts to bring about a swift de-escalation of the situation and an end to Iran's reckless and escalatory actions, which risk further instability across the region.

The Government has set out its legal position on the actions we are taking to defend UK interests and our regional partners, and our cooperation with the US in pursuance of those defensive aims in its statements of 1 March [at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-iran-1-march-2026>] and 20 March [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-the-conflict-in-the-middle-east-20-march-2026>]. Furthermore, the Government has kept Parliament informed of developments at all stages and will continue to do so. [*This sentence, with the first word omitted, is repeated as a separate paragraph.*]

We also welcome the proposed talks between the US and Iran and recognise the efforts of Pakistan and others in supporting negotiations. The UK has been working internationally to support the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and a swift resolution to the conflict.

We will continue to work with partners to support the ceasefire, promote progress on negotiations, and ensure that Iran cannot threaten its neighbours or freedom of navigation in the Strait. The UK has been clear that

Lebanon must be included in the ceasefire agreement.

The situation remains fast-moving, and we will continue to keep our response under close review. We continue to press for a negotiated settlement, which we believe is the only sustainable path to long-term peace and security.

Yours sincerely,

Parliamentary Correspondence Team
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Except for the omission noted, of the one-sentence paragraph on Parliament's being kept informed, the addition of the URL links for the two government statements, and the italicising of the names of naval vessels, the text above is as it was received. No doubt it is based on a template reply to letters of concern. The odd phrasing in the paragraph beginning "It continues to be an extremely challenging and unsettling time", in which the words these and this do not refer to anything previously mentioned, presumably results from editing; the appointment cited is surely that of the new supreme leader, who perhaps is named in the ur-text. Readers may feel that the letter's most noteworthy feature is that its strong condemnation of "appalling and reckless strikes" does not extend to those by which the war was started. Indeed, the word reckless, used three times, is only applied to actions by the Iranians.

Experiment with Light

ACROSS SCOTLAND, Experiment with Light (EwL) is followed by numerous Friends, meeting in Light Groups. For readers unfamiliar with EwL, it is a spiritual practice based on the discoveries of Early Friends, reflected in the writings of George Fox and others. The practice was developed in 1996 by Rex Ambler, a Quaker and a theologian. In the opening paragraph of *Light to Live By* he describes how he discovered "a personal practice of meditation ... in Early Friends". So, while EwL and Light Groups are relatively new within the history of Quakerism, the practice upon which they are based is as old as Quakerism itself.

Light Groups

During a Light Group one of a range of guided meditations is read, leading Friends to explore their own relationship with the Light, whilst witnessing the working of the Light in each other's lives. EwL is a core Quaker spiritual practice, which can be followed alone, but when shared within a Light Group can lead to deep understanding and support of one another. Within a Light Group each member is responsible for themselves within the silent upholding of the group. First and foremost, it is a spiritual practice: the strength of the group grows as a secondary outcome of that practice.

Our Light Group review

Our Light Group, formerly called East of Scotland Area Light Group, recently conducted a review, a recommended practice. Normally the focus

of a review would be the group itself but, because of the radical changes made nationally, we also addressed where we saw our group sitting in the wider focus of Quakers in Scotland.

Making contact with other Light Groups

Our discernments led us to identify a number of opportunities. For example, we felt drawn to establish links with other Light Groups in Scotland with a view to holding some joint meetings as an enrichment for us all. We should like to develop both contact and support between groups, while providing information about EwL and Light Groups on the QiS website as a general resource for all.

To that end we are trying to make contact with other Light Groups in Scotland, seeking up-to-date information on them. Therefore, we call on readers of *Sesame* who are members of a Light Group or know of the existence of a Light Group, to make contact using the email address at the end of this article. In the past we would have been able to use the EwL Network list on their website, but sadly the network is not currently functioning and so the list is out of date.

Our name

Our review also considered the name of our group, as we had been called East of Scotland Area Light Group. That name was now out-of-date as ESAM is no more and, furthermore, our members actually cover a wide area of Scotland, not simply East Scotland. So we needed a name not limited to an area of Scotland; and, as we meet on the first Sunday of each month, we alighted on **The First Sunday Light Group**.

Please feel free to make contact by email (first-sunday-light-group@quaker.scot) should you wish for more information of our group, or for a copy of our review, or if you are aware of other Light Groups in Scotland.

Busa Cochrane-Muir (St Andrews LM)
Enid Harding and Marion McGivern (Perth LM)

Further reading: www.experiment-with-light.org.uk

Rex Ambler – *Light to Live By* (2002), Quaker Books, Friends House

The letter opposite was initiated by the group Rethinking Security, “a network of UK-based organisations, academics and activists” – see <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/> – in association with Friends House. It has been signed by more than fifty other humanitarian, climate and peace-building organisations. A copy has also been sent to Andy Burnham MP, the Prime Minister’s likely successor. There is more about it, with further comment from some of the signatories, at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/diverse-coalition-urges-pm-to-rethink-military-spending>

An Open Letter to the Prime Minister

1 July 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

As you prepare to stand down as Prime Minister, having released a Defence Investment Plan which found another £15bn for the military, you will be readying yourself to attend the NATO Summit in Ankara. At this time, we wish to outline our grave concerns about the increasing focus of resources on the military over other forms of international engagement. Development, diplomacy, peacebuilding, conflict and atrocity prevention are all essential and underfunded tools in building a safer world. We also know that tensions are lowered when racial, gender and climate justice are prioritised.

Since last year's Strategic Defence Review and National Security Strategy, your government has repeatedly heralded a national conversation on security. This has yet to materialise.

There is a clear public appetite for broader discussion on how to build a more secure, resilient and peaceful world, with many unconvinced by the prevalent 'war-footing' narrative and focus on rearmament.

The public's wider view of security

Recent polling suggests the public supports both 'peacebuilding' and 'maintaining defence capacity' at similar levels, while placing even greater importance on climate action and international cooperation¹ *. Meanwhile, most Britons' concerns around security centre on domestic issues such as affordability, access to healthcare, food and energy and street crime.

It is clear that British people conceive security in a broad range of ways beyond military force.

Shift of focus from development, climate action and conflict resolution

We note that your government's current spending plans for this parliament already envisage military spending at its highest level since World War II in real terms, and the highest level in over 30 years as a percentage of GDP. By next year, the UK's ratio of military to international development spending will reach almost nine-to-one. Just six years ago, that ratio was below four-to-one. If the UK follows through on commitments made at the last NATO summit to increase military spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2035, this ratio will be skewed further. At the same time, diplomatic, development, education and other 'soft power' capabilities face significant cuts, reducing the UK's ability to analyse and engage effectively with global challenges. This represents a staggering shift of public resources from potentially productive to destructive ends, at a time of intense humanitarian need: 65 active state-based armed conflicts globally², which increasingly kill civilians as well combatants, and over 117 million forcibly displaced people³.

Sending such a powerful message that the UK and NATO are preparing for war, while already greatly outspending any rival, risks provoking comparable responses, making war more likely.

* References follow on page 31.

Lack of transparency and spiralling cost of nuclear weapons

We are particularly concerned about the huge increases in spending devoted to the renewal of the UK's nuclear weapons programme. As the Public Accounts Committee recently reported, expenditure on the Defence Nuclear Enterprise was already 18% of the defence budget in 2025 and is expected to rise to a quarter of the greatly expanded budget over the next decade⁴, doubling in real terms to well over £20 billion per year.

According to ICAN figures, UK nuclear spending already considerably exceeds that of Russia – and is now the third highest in the world behind the US and China⁵. In addition to the legal and ethical implications, this represents a colossal opportunity cost to other public priorities, while remaining largely shielded from public and parliamentary scrutiny.

Security risks of biodiversity loss and the climate crisis

Nowhere is this opportunity cost more wasteful than of the lost potential to accelerate the transition to a low carbon future, embracing clean energy and investing in international climate finance. As this year's HMG *Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security*⁶ assessment showed, the risk of environmental breakdown to UK national and human security is highly likely and potentially catastrophic. Funding climate action creates meaningful work at a rate that far outstrips arms manufacturing; investment in green industries and clean energy already employs over 1.1 million in the UK and, according to the IMF⁷, has a higher multiplier effect.

Sustainable security for all

Building a secure society means actively preparing for peace. While we recognise current geopolitical tensions as well as the pressure on the UK government from its traditional allies, we believe that capabilities to build peace, sustainability and societal resilience should be reprioritised.

The UK has previously shown leadership in areas such as peacebuilding, preventing sexual violence in conflict, support for global climate cooperation and international criminal justice; it is vital to renew and expand upon such commitments.

In Ankara you will face pressure to further entrench the UK in a war-orientated economy. We urge you to resist this, as others in Europe have done, and to take to a more productive path where the UK commits itself to a cooperative, internationalist future in which it nurtures the skills, capacities and institutions required to build lasting and just peace, and stability in an uncertain world.

Yours sincerely,

Rethinking Security
Quakers in Britain
ActionAid UK
Action on Armed Violence
Anglican Pacifist Fellowship
Article 36
CAFOD

Campaign Against Arms Trade
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
Christian Aid
Christian Campaign for Nuclear
Disarmament
Christian Climate Action
CND Cymru

Conflict and Environment Observatory	Nuclear Information Service
Conscience: Taxes for Peace not War	ODI Global
Cymdeithas y Cymod (Fellowship of Reconciliation)	Omega Research Foundation
Cymru Global	Pax Christi Scotland
Demilitarise Education	Peace Direct
Drone Wars UK	Peace Pledge Union
Faith for the Climate	Saferworld
Fellowship of Reconciliation (England and Scotland)	Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund
ForcesWatch	Scientists for Global Responsibility
Gender Action for Peace and Security	Scotland's International Development Alliance
Global Climate Justice Cymru	Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
Global Justice Now	Scottish Peace Network
Green New Deal Rising	Secure Scotland
Health Poverty Action	Shadow World Investigations
The Iona Community	Stop the Arms Fair
Justice & Peace Scotland	Transition Security Project
Lakenheath Alliance for Peace	United Nations Association UK
Medact	War on Want
Minorities in Peace and Security UK	WILPF UK
Movement for the Abolition of War	Women in Black London
Northern Friends Peace Board	World BEYOND War

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 3. UNHCR Global Trends report, 11 June 2026.
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 7. Batini, di Serio, Fragetta, Malina, *Building Back Better: How Big Are Green Spending Multipliers?*, IMF Working Paper, March 2021.
<https://www.imf.org/en/publications/wp/issues/2021/03/19/building-back-better-how-big-are-green-spending-multipliers-50264>

Quakers Yard Revisited

THE ARTICLE about the South Wales village of Quakers Yard ('The Salt of the Earth' in *Sesame* 265) took Tony and me back down memory lane, as we had lived there between 1988 and 1994. In fact, we had 15 minutes of fame (in the local paper) as the first Quakers to be living in the village for well over a century! We had only become Quakers the previous year, and moved to the area when I got my first teaching job, in the adjoining village of Edwardsville.

In stating that the Friends' Burial Ground (which gave the village its name) had been built over, and its exact location lost, the article was incorrect: it lies beside the main road, and, when we first saw it, was covered in dull concrete slabs and a very incongruous paved brick cross. The gravestone mentioned by George Borrow was still there, however.



We felt it would be nice to re-kindle Friends' interest in the Burial Ground; in 1992 a group of us from Cardiff local meeting (some 15 miles away) removed a few of the slabs and planted some trees.

The following year, the local Groundwork Trust funded a much bigger restoration project (in consultation with South Wales Area Meeting), including more planting and replacement of the concrete slabs with sandstone. Local school-children helped out, and there were at least two summer gatherings where Cardiff Quakers held outdoor worship at the Burial Ground, followed by a picnic and walk along the Taff Trail (the River Taff passes through the village).

We eventually moved to other valleys towns, and then to Scotland, but still go back to Cardiff regularly to see family, and made a point of visiting Quakers Yard when we were in the area in June.

The trees we planted are huge these days, but we were surprised to find that the slabs (apart from the gravestone) have disappeared and the area has now rewilded into a patch of meadow. Whether local Quakers still visit, we don't know – but we rather like its new natural/neglected 'look',

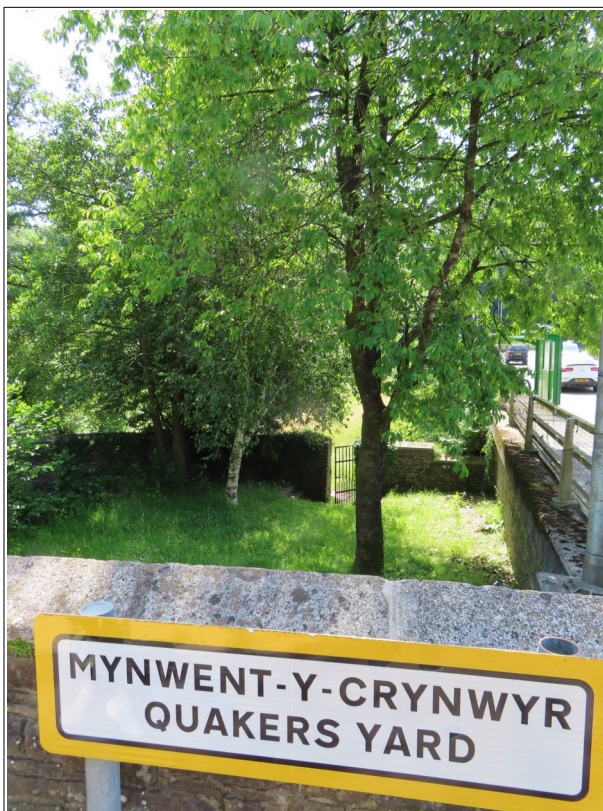
and it remains “a lovely resting place”, as Borrow described it in 1862.

Sue Proudlove

Right:
*Schoolchildren
at work on re-
planting,
1993.*



Below:
*Two views of
the Yard in
2026*



There is more on the history of Quakers Yard at

<https://www.merthyr-history.com/?tag=quakers-yard-burial-ground> and at
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/webarchive/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.co.uk%2Fblogs%2Fwales%2Fentries%2F3bceb0c6-bc6c-3ba4-86a9-664080798702>

Book of Discipline Revision Committee update July 2026

THIS TIME NEXT YEAR we will all be preparing to go to Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) in Hull to consider the first draft of our new book, provisionally entitled *Our Quaker Way: the spiritual discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*.

You'll remember that Yearly Meeting 2018 discerned that the time was right for another revision of our Book of Discipline, of which *Quaker Faith & Practice* is the current version. BYM minute 31 exhorted those working on the new book to be *prayerful, creative, joyful and bold*. A Book of Discipline Revision Committee was appointed and met for the first time in May 2019. I was one of the twenty-four Friends of all ages and from all parts of Britain who met in Friends House and began the task on your behalf.

Seven years and a lot of hard work, prayer, creativity, joy and boldness later, your committee met in Leeds, 5-7 June, for a final weekend with the draft text. It has now been handed over to the publications team at Friends House, who are working on both a print and an online version. Cost considerations mean that only a part of the draft will be presented as an audio version – but of course the final text will be recorded in its entirety.

The key messages from the meeting are:

We are at point of change as we prepare to share Our Quaker Way more widely. We have spent some time reflecting on our hopes and fears for this next stage.

We are ready to share Living as a Quaker – Advices and queries for Quakers in Britain as part of Our Quaker Way in November this year.

Examples of non-text material will be made available online alongside the draft text publication.

Woodbrooke and Quakers in Britain are working together to offer resources and other opportunities to support the 'read, reflect, respond' programme for the draft text. We are excited at the opportunities these will provide for Friends to engage with Our Quaker Way.

We remind Friends that the discernment of the draft text will take place during Yearly Meeting in July 2027

The draft will be launched at Yearly Meeting in Friends House on 21 November this year. YMG in Hull will be held 24-27 July 2027 – so you will have seven months in which to read, reflect on, and respond to the text. In the meantime, your committee, in collaboration with Woodbrooke and Friends House staff, is preparing resources and guidance to help you navigate your way through the text, however you choose to spend time with it, and to set up ways for you to respond, however you have been studying it. And we need to prepare ourselves, too! Some find it easy to receive and digest feedback, whether positive or negative. Others, myself included, do not. Part of our weekend was a workshop to help us think how we might

deal with that really awkward question that comes unexpectedly in the coffee queue at meeting, or the rant that comes as part of feedback during a study session, in person or online. It was reassuring that I needn't be able to answer everyone's questions on everything.

I am also reminded that I have to see where a questioner is coming from. Conflict can be positive: I need to work on trying to find common ground in which to have a conversation rather than rushing in, hackles up and breathing fire! Remember, friends: we have been working on this text for *seven years*. Letting go of it is in some ways a delight: seeing it reach you, the people for whom it has been written. In other ways, it's very hard: we've watched this text grow over the years, and now we have to let it go out into the world. Please, Friends, think of this as you frame your responses to our text, especially when doing it to one of us in person ...

Among the other business of the weekend was consideration of the groups needed for our work over the next few months as we prepare you to read the text. Some groups, such as the Communicating with Friends (CwF) group – of which I'm a member – the group working with the publications team, groups working on compiling a glossary and tagging the submissions you send us, and the group looking for non-text material to illustrate our text, will continue to serve.

Tasks for the groups set up include: working with Agenda Planning Committee in the months leading up to YM in November; creating pathways to guide readers through the draft text; writing and editing material to publicise the draft through publications and online communicators; and preparing to receive and process your responses. The group of which I'm now co-convenor – along with my dear friend Jess Hubbard-Bailey – is to work with Woodbrooke and Friends House staff on Visiting Meetings and Groups to help you to whatever degree you feel you need in reading, reflecting on and responding to the draft text.

It's early days yet, but we are due to become pretty busy over the next few months – and I know it will be a joy to visit you either physically or online, to tell the story so far and introduce you to the draft text.

And so we move into the next stage of our work. It seems very sad to think that we won't be together in person until July 2027 in Hull – but we will have a number of online meetings between now and then, as well as the virtual 'drop-ins' that are held from time to time. We've also begun attending online book groups organised by two of our younger members, to help familiarise us with the text before its release, and to enable them to devise guidance that can be offered to you, Friends, once the draft is released.

So, to remind you:

21 November 2026: *Our Quaker Way* draft text is released;

24 – 27 July 2027: Yearly Meeting Gathering in Hull will discern the next steps forward.

This gives you **seven months** to read the draft text. It can be divided into six sections, which gives you one month for each section and a seventh to formulate your responses to contribute to the discernment in Hull.

Hard copy and electronic versions of the text will be available: there will be an audio version of some of the draft.

You can work on it by yourself, in small groups, as a local meeting, as an area meeting. You will be able to respond to the text via the Woodbrooke website.

Look at your diaries now, Friends! Set aside time to engage with it, in whatever way you can – it's your draft: make sure you are involved in its further development...

Meanwhile, please continue to uphold us prayerfully as we transition into this new stage of your committee's working life: we can't do this without you!

Mary Woodward



Ten members (out of 24) of the Book of Discipline Revision Committee, Leeds, April 2024. On the left, Jennifer Kavanagh, Stevie Krayner, Matt Moore; at the end, Michael Booth (committee secretary), Catherine Brewer and Rosie Carnall (co-clerks); on the right, Sally Kikaya, Pearl Johns, Anya Nanning-Ramamurthy, Tas Cooper (with his face in his hands). Photo by Mary Woodward

Twelve Quakers and Jesus

Quaker Quest, 2007, ISBN 978-0-9543459-6-9

This is the sixth pamphlet published by the core group of Quaker Quest; the others being on God, Worship, Pacifism, Evil, and Simplicity. Quaker Quest is a series of open meetings for people interested in the Quaker way: a spiritual path for today which is simple, radical and contemporary. The project began in London in 2002. Each pamphlet is a short collection of personal reflections on themes which stand at the heart of the Quaker faith and have frequently arisen during question time.

Is it time for South East Scotland to have its own Quaker Quest Group?

Rachel Frith

Central Edinburgh L.M. - Spiritual Review

A local meeting spiritual review 2026: *Learning from community perspectives*

The spiritual review co-ordinating group: Eliza Giles, Madeleine Harding, Juliet Henderson, Jean Kenyon, Susan Kime, Alan Sayle

Introduction: the call for a spiritual review

'A spiritual review is relevant to any meeting, whatever its circumstances – long established or just getting on its feet, confident or troubled. Where a meeting is working well it is an opportunity for clear-eyed and optimistic appraisal and a chance to envisage fresh possibilities. For a meeting addressing difficulty or facing a challenge, a spiritual review can be an important step in finding constructive ways forward. We can certainly expect that a review will help Friends in our meeting become more aware – of each other, their meeting, their hopes and aspirations, the challenges they face, and their Quaker faith.'

'Spiritual Reviews': Volume 3 of the Eldership and Oversight Handbooks

The spiritual review process

Elders were aware that Central Edinburgh last undertook a spiritual review in 2015.

A document was prepared, setting out a draft framework to present to Local Meeting for Worship for Business, asking Friends if the Meeting wanted to proceed with a Spiritual Review and two co-facilitators were duly appointed to take the project forward.

A Woodbrooke *Where You Are* full-day event, "Being A Quaker Community" on 6 December 2025, at 7 Victoria Terrace, was an excellent opportunity to launch the spiritual review, and local Friends, led by Wendy Hampton, shared ideas, stories and fellowship exploring our Spiritual journeys.

Following this session an email with a lively poem was sent to all Friends and Attenders informing them the spiritual review was underway. At the spiritual review committee's first meeting, it was agreed that a range of safe, inclusive spaces were needed to hear as many perspectives as possible from Friends who felt called to participate. The aim was to offer different ways by which Friends of different ages could share their insights into the spiritual life of the meeting, including those who rarely attend.

These considerations led to the following:

- the development of a questionnaire to be completed online or on paper, with anonymity of comments duly respected. A calling letter was emailed to all Friends with the questionnaire at the beginning of January 2026 and Friends and Attenders on the Central List and responses collected until early February. Forms were also made available on each Sunday in January for handwritten responses.
- a lunch-time table discussion with the questionnaire as a starting point
- an all-age meeting for worship activity in which children and some adults in which they drew and wrote down what brought them happiness in their lives. N.B. Happiness was identified as 'teen and child speak' for spirituality by one of our teenage Friends.

- an invitation to meeting committees to give group responses on how they felt the Spirit led the community

The questionnaire included the following four questions, to which Friends were encouraged to write answers as short or as long as felt right for them:

1. What do you value about Central Edinburgh Meeting?
2. How do you feel your spirituality is nurtured?
3. What changes, if any, would you like to see over the next two years?
4. What do we need to do as a Meeting to effect any such changes?

Twenty-seven completed questionnaires were received, and responses were collated under the question headings.

Five people attended the worshipful, interesting table discussion with reflections enriched by listening to each other.

Ten 'happiness' stars were created at the all-age meeting for worship and offered to the spiritual review group.

None of the committees chose to give group responses.

We are seekers but we are also the holders of a precious heritage of discoveries. We, like every generation, must find the Light and Life again for ourselves. Only what we have valued and truly made our own, not by assertion but by lives of faithful commitment, can we hand on to the future. Even then, we must humbly acknowledge that our vision of the truth will, again and again be amended.

(Introduction to Quaker Faith & Practice)

Finding the spirit and learning in the responses

The spiritual review group were delighted with the range and diversity of responses that gave a moving picture of what holds us together as a community and informs the way we wish to go forward. Whilst we cannot include the detail of all your responses word-for-word, we hope to have been true to the living spirit of them all, including convergences and divergences. Consideration of the points made by Friends are grouped below under themes that related both to the questions and what emerged from responses. **N.B. Words taken directly from responses included below are shown in italics between quotation marks ["thus"].**

Community as a spiritual home and safe place of belonging

Many Friends deeply valued our Quaker meeting as a spiritual community where the Meeting for Worship is the "home" at which we gather in shared openness to the spirit to guide, challenge, and resource us in our lives both within and outside the community. For some newcomers it is where the seed of a spiritual encounter grows. It is a "non-prescriptive" sacred space to "commune with others", "wait on God's voice", and "feel the embodied collective correspondence with the spirit as the meeting settles into stillness". The Meeting House is also valued as a special physical space, with a "beautiful energy", and more practically, its easy access by transport given its central location. This location means visitors from around the world often join us for one meeting or more, thus adding to the diversity of our community.

Another powerful message from many was appreciation of the welcoming warmth and “generous attention” of the people in our “supportive inter-generational community”; there through all “the ups-and-downs” of life. Many value the “reassurance, camaraderie, and rootedness” found in the meeting, and mention is made of being inspired by Friends who “serve, think, and act” their faith, work on outreach, and “whose lives speak outside the walls of 7 Victoria Terrace”. Of note too, is feeling “safe and valued” in the specific “sexuality” or gender choice that is part of spirituality. The recognition of our Meeting as one that includes those from all seasons of life and all dimensions of spirituality was echoed in frequent mention of the value of all-age meeting for worship that “expands the spiritual quality of the meeting to include a child’s insight into our testimonies”.

Breaking bread together

The interplay between worshipful silent or spoken ministry and the conversations over shared soup and coffee after Meeting for Worship are for many a core part of the spiritual connection fostered at the meeting. The shared soup lunches allow us to get to know each other, to laugh together, to ask questions, find out more about and bond with those we worship with. Preparing the soup and clearing up encourages the same. Here too the ‘living stream of worship’ and love flows.

Nurturing spiritual vitality

There were many mentions of the various opportunities for learning more about Quakers and spirituality as a sought-after way to nurture understanding of Quaker practices and sense more into an understanding of a reality beyond our reasoning and values. The Woodbrooke sessions, *Sesame*, books in the library, the Exploring Spirituality discussions, the Becoming Friends and Deepening Friendship group were cited in this context, some having “a refreshing vigour” to them which healthily challenged complacency and comfort zones. The Meetings for Worship for Business were also cited several times as a spiritual learning space where we “consider issues tenderly together to discern a way forward” and “give everyone equally a chance to express their views”.

Also frequent in comments was how conversations with the diverse community of members and attenders at the meeting affirm that the world is good, sustain many in their activism work, and open perspectives on Quaker ways to be and act.

It was interesting to note that there were two reflections shared that Meeting for Worship did *not* often nurture their spirituality. The first, felt we needed to use the Meeting House with more sessions for the homeless for this to be the case, and the second found they nurtured their spirituality in other ways, such as walking in nature and singing.

Younger ways to deep happiness/being at one with the world

There were inspiring ideas of what brings deeper happiness, or a sense of spiritual fulfilment on the star images children, teenagers and two adults had drawn and/or written. Central were the outdoor world of nature and physi-

cal activity: swimming, stargazing, hot-air ballooning, walking by the Water of Leith, paddleboarding and more. But there was also singing, going to pop concerts, eating with others, and shopping. All of these portray a fresh, embodied, material sense of ways to find the divine outside the context of the meeting house and Meeting for Worship.

Practicalities and the running of the Meeting

This part of the review focuses on responses to the two questions about possible changes, and ways to affect them. A lot of, though not all, these responses seem to spring organically from what is appreciated about Central Edinburgh Meeting, a nudge to go further with what is there in our spiritual ecosystem. A few felt there was little to change and that sensible innovation was already part of the ways of our Meeting.

In arbitrary order the suggestions made are listed below:

- The blankets recently acquired for the meeting room were seen as an important first step in ensuring it was more welcoming and comfortable. Ergonomic back cushions would add to this.
- Refurbishment of the Meeting House to make it more vibrant and welcoming
- Four requests for Afterwords were made, with the suggestion that once a month Meeting for Worship simply end ten minutes earlier.
- Continue with much of the good work already in place including helping newcomers for a part of the community and providing informal discussions at lunchtime and meetings for learning such as the Woodbrooke sessions.
- Elders, pastoral carers, clerks and nominations working together strategically for the good of our meeting.
- More people attending Meetings for Worship for Business and study groups.
- More people coming into membership.
- More people from our diverse community feeling called by Quaker discipline to take on the roles that hold our meeting together: elders, clerks, nominations, pastoral care, management committee. Not only does this foster spiritual growth it would make the meeting more sustainable and provide critical resource to help make many of the changes suggested.
- More discussion of roles to get newer people involved without pressuring them. Possible shadowing of role holders. Be more explicit in the need for wider participation and greater inclusion of young Friends.
- A reading group which discusses Quaker texts in a worshipful manner *e.g.* the Swarthmore lectures.
- Attract more children and families to the Meeting.
- All-age creative groups.
- More Friends stepping up with love to share the gifts they bring with others by leading groups, table discussions *etc.*
- More events like 'Concerns of the Day' that provide "*quiet processes in*

small circles” for the wider community amidst the “*increasing noise and aggression in public discourse*”.

- More outreach and outreach discussions.
- More use of the Meeting House foyer in the week for outreach, *e.g.* a child-friendly café by day and a place for small discussions by night.
- More study events at different times of the day; led walks; residential weekends; use of the back library

The two main categories of suggestion in this list can roughly be summarised as (a) more Friends stepping up to serve the Meeting and expanding their capacity to love and act in the world, and (b) more opportunities to learn together through outreach, discussion, walks, creativity, reading and study, preparing and eating food together. It is interesting to note that the realisation of the first would naturally encourage fulfilment of the other. Finding out how to encourage the first would seem to be key to achieving the latter.

Concluding thoughts

At this point, *Our Faith in the Future* (2016), a text we referred to in the spiritual review committee meetings when designing the questionnaire, seems a helpful framework for reflecting on the wonderful contributions made to this spiritual review by our diverse, spiritually seeking community. As the review clearly shows most Friends experience a deep sense of community, and a depth of spirit and testimony among our members and attenders. Yet whilst a lively honouring of the Quaker way is revealed in many responses, newer to some than to others, there also seems to be a keen interest in ongoing ways of renewing and awaking our community. To some extent, the six themes of ‘Faith in the future’ detailed below speak equally of our meeting’s ongoing strengths since its beginnings, to its current spiritual health, and to a future we can enact individually and as a community to deepen our spiritual lives, live by the Quaker discipline, and reach out to diverse seekers and allies. It cannot be ignored that we have conducted our spiritual review in a context of climate crisis, system collapse, and of threatening fundamentalisms, yet our faith, our trust in the divine Light, and our practices offer small, quiet ways to work to make the world a better place for all. We would suggest that the meeting reflects together on the spiritual review in dialogue with the six themes below.

- Meeting for worship is the bedrock of living as a Quaker. In worship we become one with the Spirit, with each other and with our true selves. The Spirit is the source of strength and guidance for all we are and do. Our way of worship is open to all, and we are making it more widely known.
- Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age. All are heard, valued and supported both in our needs and our leadings. Everyone’s contribution is accepted according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included. There are clear and effective ways of working together on shared concerns Fellowship and fun strengthen the bonds between us, enhancing a loving community.
- All Friends understand and live by Quaker discipline. Our discipline is

actually 'Letting go and letting God'; not 'Thou shalt' nor 'I will' but 'What does Love require of us?' It works when we understand it and practise it. Because we understand it, we can share it with others. Our testimony guides us, but we have to work on what it means for each of us personally.

- Quaker values are active in the world. Our lives speak peace, equality, respect for the earth and all its inhabitants. We offer friendship to all and solidarity to the marginalised. We speak truth to power with love. We hold those in power in the Light. We find creative and non-violent ways to get our message across. We are in this for the long haul; we're not afraid to take risks. We are called to live in the place where our 'deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet'.
- Quakers work collaboratively. We are well aware that we can't put the world to rights by ourselves. We value the important work of others. By engaging with them we are already changing the world. We want to break down barriers; we refuse to prejudge who is or is not an ally.
- Quakers are well-known and understood. We are active in our local communities, reaching out in friendship, making more use of our meeting houses for events and for renting or lending out. All members are ready and equipped to explain our Quaker way confidently and clearly to everyone who asks, as well as to speak publicly on issues of concern. We share our practices as appropriate and make full use of relevant media to reach out widely. In an increasingly divided world, we try to offer 'patterns and examples' of a caring community.

Spiritual Review Discussion

Following circulation of the draft spiritual review report, 'An Ongoing Conversation with Friends and Attenders at Central Edinburgh Local Meeting' an email was sent inviting all to a half-day of 'Abiding together in the Light'. The aim of this was to step forward from contemplation and reflection and move to action. In other words, having clarified our own spiritual needs, values and aims as Quakers in stage one of the spiritual review, how might we move forward in accordance with these to strengthen the spiritual wholeness of our local meeting.

Sixteen Friends attended the event which was co-facilitated by members of the spiritual review committee. We began with a short period of silent worship followed by 15 minutes of worshipful sharing around the two questions 'What was it like for you to complete the spiritual review questionnaire?', and 'How did you feel on reading other people's responses?'.

Prior to the event a request had been sent to Friends to revisit the list of suggested changes/improvements made in the spiritual review report and write down the three they most wanted to see happen, in order of preference. For the next activity, Friends mingled to get a sense of others' preferences and the reasons behind these, as well as get a feel of the bigger, overall issues.

Moving on from this, a plenary discussion was held in which all shared their top preference in the list of suggestions for change in the report to a white-

board. Taking into account the overlap and resonance between some suggestions, this led to three discussion groups led by a spiritual review committee facilitator. In these, people considered: (a) How we might go about creating space for and introducing these changes', and (b) What concrete contributions can people present make?

The three groups were broadly focused on (i) outreach, (ii) people feeling ready to take on roles in the meeting, (iii) alternative ways to gather and build community outside Meeting for Worship.

Outreach

Suggestions in spiritual review report leading this group	
Attract more children and families to the Meeting. More Outreach and Outreach discussions. More use of Meeting House Foyer in the week for Outreach <i>e.g.</i> a child-friendly café by day and a place for small discussions in the evening. More people coming into Membership.	
General discussion points and suggestions	
Young People (and families/others) may find Saturday or Sunday afternoons (5 pm) a better time to Meet – more use of the Garden space Messy Church – Craft activities with tea/juice and fun. Make better use of BYM Resources and Friends House expertise. Promote BYM publications/communications (social media). Learn from other (growing) Meetings. Invite Speakers from growing Meetings and Quaker writers. Follow up Doors Open Day visitors with invitation to Meeting. More colourful display of Times of Meetings (Banner), Possible family friendly café in foyer. Publicise outreach talks & learning sessions. Build mailing list of visitors and attenders. Make "Becoming Friends" a rolling (annual) programme. Ensure adequate stock of BYM Leaflets and Posters (and especially make available during Edinburgh Festival). Quakers in the World – share what we do as Quakers in our communities. Foodbank, other charities, Environmental concerns. Focus communications in line with Quaker Aims "Our Faith in the Future"	
Commitment to action	
Active Children and Young Peoples Committee will continue its work.	X
Two Friends* from Area Meeting are to organise two workshops to take the Outreach Project forward. * [See	X
A Friend will check/order BYM Outreach materials – leaflets/posters as appropriate.	X

People feeling ready to assume roles in the Meeting

Suggestions in spiritual review report leading this group	
More people from our diverse community feeling called by Quaker discipline to take on the roles that hold our meeting together: elders, clerks, nominations, pastoral care, management committee. Not only does this foster spiritual growth it would make the meeting more sustainable and provide critical resource to help make many of the changes suggested. More discussion of roles to get newer people involved without pressuring them. Possible shadowing of role holders. Be more explicit in the need for wider participation and greater inclusion of young Friends. More Friends stepping up with love to share the gifts they bring with others by leading groups, table discussions <i>etc.</i>	
General discussion points and suggestions	
Make roles seem more user-friendly. Not duties, but responses to love and truth as well as opportunities for learning. Simple forms of service. Bite-sized involvement. There is already welcoming, soup-making, washing and clearing up after lunch which offers gentler, initial involvement in running of meeting. Perhaps reconsider someone serving coffee as way to get to know people in meeting. Important to understand what is involved in roles and the benefits of serving. Make clear that roles are not never-ending and be specific in role descriptions. Those in roles to set up mentor/mentee or buddy system. Invite people to shadow and experience different roles. Perhaps have <i>e.g.</i> 'junior' clerks' role. Not to press new members and attenders for involvement too soon. More a gentle inclusion approach. Important to use discernment and approach so that those asked appreciate it is an honour to be asked – a recognition of their presence and attention. Poss. suggest meeting for lunch/coffee to discuss things. What would encourage people but not frighten them?	
Commitment to action	
Compile a list of roles and holders with a brief description	X
Prepare an overview of an infrastructure that involves mentoring and buddy system	X
Share roles descriptions of local mtg in country of origin with Cent Ed LM	X

Building Community

Suggestions in spiritual review report leading this group
More study events at different times of the day; led walks; residential weekends; use of the back library. Continue with much of the good work already in place including helping newcomers form a part of the community and providing informal discussions at lunch

time and meetings for learning such as the Woodbrooke sessions. A reading group discussing Quaker texts in a worshipful manner <i>e.g.</i> Swarthmore lectures.	
General discussion points and suggestions	
It just needs someone to think of it and take immediate action. One way is to stand up at the end of Notices after MfW (when the clerk asks if anything has been missed) with a simple comment like "I'm going to such and such a film at the Film House on ... at ... Does anyone want to join me?" Or telling the clerk by email something to include in next week's notices. Table Discussions, (sign on the table) at some Sunday lunchtimes, on <i>e.g.</i> Aspects of Spirituality, which could supplement the monthly "Exploring Spirituality" longer and more formal discussions. Build on events offered by individual Friends such as the guided tour of the Botanics. (Someone mentioned the Botanics and Cathy Bell has got involved – now we have a date for a guided tour.) Focus on the informal.	
Commitment to action	
Run a meditation group	X

N.B. Where options for change are identified, and it is appropriate, concerned Friends may prepare a proposal to present to Local Meeting for Worship for Business. This should outline the activity allowing the Clerks to circulate the document along with the agenda, giving local Friends time to consider the matter and understand what is requested and importantly, who is prepared to undertake the work.

Final conclusions

The spiritual review committee have found the process of engaging with our local meeting to identify and highlight areas to celebrate and issues to reflect an enriching service. We note this document is not an action document, more of a call to action. Now this record of the contemporary health of the meeting committee is complete, we leave the report as a reference point.

Supplementary Information

Membership [from <i>Bk of Members</i> , 2025]	Buses – Lothian Buses
Members: 72	George IV Bridge: 9, 23, 27
Attenders: 94	Forrest Road: 2, 9, 23, 27, 35, 45, 47
Members of other meetings: 4	South Bridge:
	3, 5, 7, 8, 14, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 37, 45, 49
Access	
Meetings Sunday 9:30 (<i>Blended</i>) & 11am	Cycles can be secured / parked
(1st Sunday All Age Worship)	Restricted Parking (<i>Blue Badge availability</i>)
Children's Meeting 3 rd & 5 th Sundays	Ground floor: Accessible / Unisex Toilets
Tea / Coffee + simple lunch	Mtg Room: Audio / Visual + hearing loop
Wheelchair ramp from Victoria Terrace	Premises: 7 Victoria Terrace, EH1 2JL
& lift to all floors	Office staffed Mon-Fri. Tel. 0131-225-4825

Email: office@equaker.org.uk

Website:

quakersscotland.org/central-edinburgh

Notices – email list

Welcome / Duty Doorkeepers

Information: BYM Leaflets / Books
Publications: *The Friend*, *Ethical Consumer*
[Sesame]

Committees / Role Holders – *see updated list, Sunday Folder*
Our Faith in the Future (2016) Google Docs

South Edinburgh Meeting Spiritual Review 2025-2026 **Open for Transformation**

Inspired by the 2023 Portobello and Musselburgh Meeting's Spiritual Review, South Edinburgh Friends expressed a wish to undertake a similar review.

Here is a sense of the journey we undertook together as a Meeting, considering the interplay between our inner walk and outward witness.

This involved a considerable time commitment and a willingness to be open to one another in a new way, so thank you to all who took part. We are still responding to and delivering on what the review revealed, remaining, we hope, 'open to transformation,' the theme of the reflections we made together. When our Local Meeting for Worship for Business was ready to design our own review, it became apparent that the small attendance at our Meetings for Worship for Business, heavy existing commitments and our older age profile meant we simply felt unable to take on a big survey. We agreed to trust in an evolving programme of small groups for spiritual reflections and social events which we hoped would inform and enrich one another providing the material for our review.

As we had hoped, this process began step by step over the following months with various members offering to host, facilitate, record, and participate and after months together we collectively drew up a meeting-wide survey of Friends' experience of our Meeting.

The following events emerged which enabled us to get to know one another more fully, increased our momentum and contributed to our reflective groups:

- Two workshops for the entire meeting: one on *What is Ministry?* the other on *Discerning our spirit-given gifts* led by Zoe Prosser
- A Newcomer's Welcome evening in May, followed by a further social event
- Small groups for Meetings for Learning, exploring relevant questions
- Creative art making in our two groups facilitated by an artist member
- Towards the end of our group reflections, we drew up a Meeting Survey.

Open to Transformation?

I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place

Rufus Jones 1937 (*Q.F.&P.* 24.64)

Our joyful Newcomers' Welcome took place in the sun filled garden of one of our members. Following this Friends were invited to join an evening or day-time group for spiritual reflections based on Ben Pink Dandelion's book *Open*

for Transformation, which drew on his 2014 Swarthmore Lecture.

Eleven Friends signed up for the evening group and seven for the afternoon. Given our average Meeting attendance at that time comprised 15-20 Friends this was encouraging.

At a Local Meeting it was agreed an Elder would facilitate the two groups.

A co-facilitator came forward for each group which met in two different homes. Providing a safe space for sharing and appropriate confidentiality was respected in all aspects of our times together. The questions for reflection covered:

- Celebrating the Quaker Way
- Our spiritual experience
- Living the Quaker Way
- Identifying our spiritual gifts and needs as a meeting
- How our meeting works

Our findings are gathered from these two groups and the online Meeting Survey we distributed. We are using the term *members* to cover attenders and Members of South Edinburgh Meeting. Friends' verbal and written responses are shown in italics.

Discovery

Adopting an approach suggested in the Quaker booklet on Spiritual Reviews¹ we found Discovery, Dreams, Design and Deliver a useful way to consider our findings.

Why do Friends come to our meeting? What do they celebrate and value about it? And how is it nurtured?

From our two groups we discovered that Worship and Community were the two elements *underpinning and being the source of life and growth* in our Meeting which has increased in number, with deepening of relationships and worship over the period we have been sharing.

I so value the huge support of the gathered meeting at South Edinburgh. Consistency of attendance was noted and valued, and the worship was attributed to the holy spirit moving amongst us, an absence of prepared ministry taking place all within a sense of safety and shared values. We regularly move from silence to an underlying stillness.

It is in the quality of our shared stillness that a spiritual Presence is felt. Sharing our spiritual experiences led to a new level of openness and depth of fellowship. It revealed the differences in our individual journeys to Friends, our backgrounds, our spiritual experiences or absence of them and variety of beliefs. We were able to discuss openly within our safely held spaces.

An exercise drawn from Advices and Queries 28 'Responding to divine guidance' revealed a divergence in a group with some Friends wanting to omit reference to the words divine guidance while others wanted it acknowledged as underpinning Quakerism.

It was in these reflections we showed an *openness and acceptance of one another*,

1. Volume 3 of the Eldership and Oversight handbook series

being affirmed in all our variety of beliefs, *receptive* and united in holding our underlying recognition and experience of Love and the Divine, whatever term was used.

This sense of unity and community pervaded our relating within and outwith the context of meeting for worship. There was a sense that the Advice 'Seek to know one another in the eternal' had become a living reality.

Discovery through the online Meeting Survey

1. Have you felt welcomed in South Edinburgh Meeting?

18 out of 21 people who responded felt warmly welcomed. For 3 not so.

We get this just about right. People have been very kind "It feels very inclusive

I know at HEART it is very inclusive

I think we do pretty well with this

I have been very grateful to have found the Meeting and made me feel I belong.

It's a good Meeting. Treasure it and each person in it

I come to Meeting, especially here, because I feel the 'fruitage of the spirit' and am nourished spiritually by the community.

South Edinburgh is an ideal size in terms of noting new attendees and having a richness of ministry and social interaction

The depth of our worship seems to have deepened with a genuine caring

Discovering our Creativity

The two groups experienced a session on creativity planned by our artist member. Through this the groups discovered a freedom and creativity we would like to use more fully in the life of our Meeting. By now we had an openness to new ways shown in these creative sessions. This did entail however a certain bewilderment at her instructions as we shifted from our usual cognitive purpose to abandoning ourselves to be randomly creative, culminating with two group collages. We were able to look at the process and how we needed to be pushed in order to move beyond the familiar. This provided a rich learning experience.

FROM DISCOVERY TO DREAMS

2. How could your welcome be improved? ... and

3. How might our Meeting be more inclusive?

Moving on to dreams and hopes for our Meeting the survey responses conveyed:

'People dream of a Meeting that is warm and welcoming, that builds on relationships with newcomers who stay, that is inclusive and diverse, that reaches all demographics, with disabled access and facilities, where new folks are not missed, where people do not remain strangers, where they get to know each other, where people of all faiths feel welcome, where small friend-ship circles do not exclude others, where each person is treasured, where we are alert to possibilities and listen, where our minds and hearts are open, where we have richness of ministry and social interaction, where we feel connected and have depth of worship and genuine caring.'

One area where the survey pointed to specific hopes and expectations was

the suggested topics for future small group Meeting for Learning. It is activities such as these that are full of possibilities for learning, spiritual growth and unity. There is a spread of topics favoured on the chart, but Socials and Spiritual have the most first preferences. Our experience over this review is that getting to know one another socially led to a deeper sharing which was transformative. We will be looking at this over the coming year.

People were invited to rank the six suggestions for next priorities.

Testimonies	Advices & Queries	Peacemaking	Socials	Spiritual	Writings
2	4	3	1	6	5
5	1	2	4	6	3
2	1	3	2	3	1
3	6	2	5	1	4
2	3	1	4	5	6
3	2	6	6	1	4
2	5	3	4	1	6
2	3	3	1	3	3
4	2	5	1	6	3
3	2	3	1	3	3
4	3	2	5	1	6
2.91	2.91	3.00	3.09	3.27	4.00

‘What did we hope for in the coming years for our meeting, our community and for wider concerns? What did we need to work at?’

Our reflective groups expressed the hope that our life together in our Meeting should prompt and enable us to *live the Quaker way - Simple, Radical, Spiritual*, live out the peace testimony; address and campaign against climate change and ecological degradation *implementing immediate practical action that we know about* and attempt to challenge the injustice and domination of our economic and political systems by greed and self-interest.

It is hard to distinguish between who we are and who we are as Quakers.

It is important to live out what we believe. A balance is needed between activism and spiritual nourishment. A note of caution came from one Friend Be careful not to leave God at the door of the Meeting House. We need to focus on God, not the Meeting.

We are often doing things without announcing them to others, not always Quaker things but practical service in our local community involving Food Banks, awareness of mental illness – the Royal Edinburgh Hospital being nearby.

We want to provide a creative, supportive culture which upholds people suffering who are unheard and feeling isolated. Empathic listening.

Just being there with someone is repaid in spades. Simple spiritual support. Just being together is the business.

We identified that dreams required *listening, faithfulness and courage.*

Discerning DESIGN

What does love require of us as a meeting?

From the survey there was some uncertainty about what could be done. We have added **discernment** as we need to take into account when designing programmes the make-up and sense of our Meeting.

Age can limit active engagement, as one subgroup, all over 80 years ruefully suggested, but having the example of our 98-year-old member volunteering each week at a local charity bookshop, we can choose the activity wisely!

From all our sources we noted the absence of children with regret, but we accept we are who we are and must discern what love DOES require from us as a Meeting. We are inspired by the positive contribution and lively engagement of our elders, often rich in ministry.

We need to remember the comment 'it takes courage to face old age.' Those with chronic ill health, loss of hearing and or mobility issues require sensitive provision: scribes come forward and lifts are offered.

We have a blended Meeting each week. We cherish and genuinely value each person.

We hope to offer 'a tender hand.' This care is sensed: *Bearing in mind the allowances we must make for one another; it is difficult to know if it (our Meeting) can be improved.*

Welcoming and Nurturing Newcomers

How do we know when new folk would like to be involved without pressurising them?

Similarly, there is a need to balance friendliness without being intimidating, learning names (occasional labels) ensuring individuals are spoken to individually and followed up. *An elder or pastoral friend be appointed for this.*

The following suggestions emerged:

- Friends should continue to support the wide range of service and lobbying, such as the Open Door and Eric Liddell Centre rather than design any new service
- Cooperate with other Meetings to provide resources e.g. a further Silent Retreat [see page 21], recently shared Woodbrooke series at Central
- Extend the witness of Quakerism through outreach to young people during Fresher's week alongside other Meetings
- Advertise Quakerism more widely—as suggested at a recent Area Meeting.
- Quakers in Scotland is open to new ways and connections should extend our reach and enable learning from other Friends
- Include Friends with hearing loss more fully by offering a Film Group showing thought-provoking films with sub-titles followed by discussion
- Learning techniques such as creative listening
- *It is important wherever we end up we have disabled access and facilities. We need to keep up with Meetings for Learning around diversity and inclusion.*

We need to be actively preparing and ready for change

- *A visiting rota for members unable through illness to come to Meeting*
- Design our actions to support ethical initiatives- e.g. employ Social Bite, a charitable social enterprise if catering needed
- Lobby for the reintroduction of vouchers for the Homeless.

Nurturing ongoing friendship in our Meeting

Other suggestions unanimously mentioned more space and time after Meeting so people can really get to know each other

Regular, monthly, insight or learning, morning, afternoon or evening sessions.

A kind of book group of Quaker related issues and Quaker enquiries. Follow a Quaker publication for newcomers to gain an in-depth understanding of Quakerism.

Personally connecting through a smile – or asking someone how they are – probably makes people feel more valued than anything else.

DELIVERY

Ay, there's the rub.

We are trying to deliver on many fronts and dimensions. Many members already contribute generously of themselves. However, we need more help. This time of reflection and the Meeting Survey has revealed our list of dreams is long and our designs ambitious.

How much have we managed to deliver? Have we been Open to Transformation? How can we extend our witness and deepen our spiritual life?

The Workshop on Discovering our Spirit-given gifts encouraged Friends taking part to own their own and the contributions of others. It was affirming and a contrast to the more self-effacing tradition favoured in Britain, by Friends in particular.

Do we need to encourage a broader spread of roles in Meetings? A wider spread of caring for each other? As with all the growing Quaker Meetings in SESAM there are requests for more Meetings for Learning, more social activities, greater specialist groups and topics.

Throughout this process South Edinburgh Friends have continued:

- Our physical support for peace demonstrations concerning the Middle East, the Cladhan Hotel Protective Presence in Falkirk, Protest in Harmony and Quaker witness at the Peace Tree
- Attending Wednesday Meeting for Worship at Central and planning small worship group in home of Friend no longer able to attend
- Offering hospitality to newcomers and other social events
- The week by week managing the physical arrangements for the Meeting
- Silent Retreat set in Perthshire arranged by SEM attended by 9 women from across SESAM. Further such nurturing opportunities to be offered more widely.
- A multitude of unknown and faithful acts of kindness and care.

We recognise the contribution of our faithful members and the ongoing work of the Spirit.

May our lives speak. May we remain open to Transformation. As Meeting for Sufferings was laid down this spring the Clerk wrote:

It is easy to compare ourselves with the remarkable achievements of earlier Friends. Yet these moments were made possible by patient preparation, by relationships carefully tended, and by the quiet faithfulness of many people over long years. We are not called to be remarkable, but to be faithful, to support one another, and to trust that our service matters.

Robert Card, Clerk, March 2026

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge 'the quiet faithfulness' of current and former South Edinburgh Friends going back through time, knowing their service mattered.

In relation to this review, we thank Alison Cameron, Helen Cameron, Neil Turner, Ian and Rosamond Robertson for hosting our various groups and events. Our thanks to Sandra Riddell, Susie Reade and Alex Taylor for helping with the groups and David Somervell, the Survey. Catriona Courtier, Sandra Riddell, Esther Shreeve and Rosamond Robertson for their contribution to capturing the process in writing – and to all Friends who took part in the groups and survey – our thanks.

South Edinburgh Meeting
May 2026

Appointment of new NFPB Coordinator

Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) trustees are pleased to announce the appointment of **Irenée Rajaona-Horne** as their new Coordinator. With the current Coordinator, Philip Austin, due to retire at the end of 2026, Irenée will be starting in October, working initially with Philip for a three-month long handover period.

Irenée has most recently worked as the Chief Executive Officer for Money for Madagascar. Irenée is a Member of Lancaster Quaker Meeting, and says, in anticipation of starting her new role:

"I have long admired the work of NFPB. As a Young Quaker in the 1990s, NFPB was a source of hope and inspiration to me, as I was seeking my path into peace and inter-national development work. A few decades on, it is an honour to take on the coordination of this highly respected peace-building organisation. I am aware that I have big shoes to fill with the retirement of Philip. But I am also very excited to bring my own deep experience of growing charities and catalysing community change, which I hope will help Northern Friends to flourish in their pursuits of Peace. I love to work through synergies, collaborations and partnerships. What is more, I cannot do this alone! So I urge any Friends who have a calling for Peace to get in touch and get involved... we need all of you! Together we can make a difference!"

NFPB trustees were impressed by the range and quality of applications they received for this post. Replacing our valued Coordinator of 35 years was a major challenge. We are grateful for the support and direction from NFPB members during the process. We attracted a strong field of applicants and thank the candidates we interviewed for taking the time to meet us. We believe that we have found in Irenée the right person to support Friends in the North of Britain in their peace witness.

DEC VENEZUELA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

On 24 June, two catastrophic earthquakes hit Venezuela within seconds of each other. The UN estimates that millions of people have been affected, with more than two million in the worst impacted areas. Families have lost loved ones, homes and the sense of safety and security they once knew.

Rescuers are searching for survivors, but the scale of loss is already significant and the people of Venezuela urgently need help. Together with the 14 other charities that make up the DEC [*Disasters Emergency Committee*], we're launching a UK-wide appeal to meet the escalating needs of people affected.

Christian Aid colleagues are already working hard with our partners to assess the needs of our neighbours in Venezuela and ensure that our emergency response is exactly what and where it needs to be. Our local partners are best placed to reach affected communities with urgent assistance; they are providing emergency medical treatment, delivering meals and food baskets, and ensuring people have access to clean drinking water.

We know there is always hope in the darkest of times and we encourage you to stand with us in solidarity, and ask all those who are able, to respond to this suffering with compassion and practical help.

Val Brown, the Head of Christian Aid in Scotland and spokesperson for the DEC Scotland Appeal said:

"This is an unimaginably difficult time for the people of Venezuela affected by this disaster. [...] People are coming to terms with the fact that their whole lives have changed. Many have lost their homes and belongings, whole neighbourhoods have been destroyed with buildings reduced to rubble. The scale of the destruction is catastrophic.

"Many DEC member charities were already working in Venezuela so are able to collaborate with local and national experts. They responded immediately by delivering basic aid from the very beginning – food, water, emergency medical care. But so much more is needed now and in the coming days and weeks.

"Any donation you can make now will help save lives and help the most vulnerable people affected by this catastrophe.

"We'd like to thank the Scottish Government for their generous support for this latest appeal, the 80th in the DEC's 60 year history. We hope the £250,000 they have just released from their Humanitarian Emergency Fund will encourage people from all over Scotland to dig deep and help make a difference right now."

Recovery will take time. In the weeks and months ahead, Christian Aid's partners will continue to accompany these communities on the long road to rebuilding their lives.

Please keep the people of Venezuela, and all those responding to this crisis, in your prayers.

You can donate to the DEC Venezuela appeal via Christian Aid:

<https://caid.org.uk/HelpVenezuela>

The UK Government will match donations to the Venezuela Earthquake Appeal pound-for-pound up to £2 million, through its UK Aid Match scheme.

The Scottish Government's Faith & Belief Representatives' Group Statement of Solidarity with Racially Minoritised Communities Following Recent Incidents

The Scottish Government's Faith and Belief Representatives' Group – a strategic forum that brings together a diverse range of religious and non-religious belief communities – has prepared a joint statement in the light of recent attacks in Scotland and throughout the UK. The group supports dialogue, collaboration and direct engagement with government, and plays an important role in strengthening interfaith relations and shaping collective responses on issues such as equality, community resilience and social cohesion across Scotland.

THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S FAITH AND BELIEF REPRESENTATIVES GROUP expresses deep concern over the recent targeting of racially minoritised communities. While Scotland is widely celebrated as a welcoming, multicultural nation that embraces diversity, it is not immune from the divisive rhetoric taking hold across parts of the UK—a narrative that can lead individuals to violence.

This alarming rise in hostility was starkly demonstrated by the recent knife attacks against five men in Edinburgh. Our thoughts remain with the victims and all victims of violence and hatred. Such acts affect not only those directly involved, but entire communities, creating fear and anxiety.

Because of the deeply rooted relationships that define our communities, an attack on one community can feel like an attack on all of us. In a heartening response to the attacks in Edinburgh, faith and community leaders and local residents united in Leith to show that the local community welcomes everyone.

Similarly, as representatives of different faith and belief groups, we stand shoulder to shoulder to reject the hateful narrative, which is so often stirred up online by those seeking to spread division. We also call upon our media colleagues to ensure that all forms of violence are equally condemned, avoiding any impression that some acts are more worthy of condemnation than others.

We must continue to come together across all faiths and none to ensure that love, respect, and unity triumph over division, and that Scotland remains a safe, inclusive, and peaceful home for everyone.

*[With thanks to **Kate Arnott** for passing this on.]*

*In April, Kate Nevens, a Green Party candidate, called for the abolition of prisons – with predictable results. **Mike Nellis** (Scottish Quaker Community Justice Network) wrote in her support– <https://www.thenational.scot/politics/26008744.kate-neven-wants-abolish-prisons-not-crazy/>. In May, Kate Nevens was elected as a List MSP.*

A Day Trip

funded by the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust

Elder Park, "the green heart of Govan", opened in 1885, a gift by his widow Isabella in memory of John Elder (1824-1869), founder of the marine engineering firm that later became Fairfield's. The Friends of Elder Park is a community group founded in 2013 to ensure that the 37-acre site is maintained and preserved for the benefit of the public (see its website at <https://friendsofelderpark.wordpress.com/>). In April, at the instigation of Alastair McIntosh of Glasgow local meeting, the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust funded an outing to Loch Tay for twelve members of the FoEP, which took in visits to the Fortingall Yew (reckoned by Forestry & Land Scotland to be 5,000 years old) and the Scottish Crannog Centre at Kenmore (see <https://crannog.co.uk/>).

Annie Morgan, chair of the Friends of Elder Park, writes:

THE TRIP TO LOCH TAY was wonderful. The weather was perfect with amazing views of the Ben Lawers range, the Falls of Dochart in spate, and the ancient yew tree – fascinating.

The visit to the crannog was most educational. The tutors have archaeological backgrounds and the recreation of how the settlement functioned, food growing and preparation, blacksmithing and building, was of great interest to us.

We discuss in Govan bringing back the old skills. Of course Galgael [*with which Alastair McIntosh is associated*] has been doing so for many years.

We enjoyed a lovely meal in Aberfeldy – good food and great service.

On behalf of the FoEP group, a big thank you to the John Wigham Trust for this special opportunity.

*With thanks to **Kate Arnot** (of the JW(E)T trustees) for passing this on. Readers are reminded of the possibility of applying for a payment from the Trust; grants can be made to*

deserving persons resident in Scotland who owing to straitened circumstances are unable to enjoy the usual pleasures in life, the purpose of such grants being to provide the recipients with some additional comfort or pleasure of an exceptional nature over and above the usual necessities of life.

Applications should be supported by a member of the Religious Society of Friends (usually a Pastoral Friend) but applicants need not themselves be in membership. Contact Pastoral Friends for more information.

Our Friend the composer **Sally Beamish** will be 70 on 26 August, but celebrated early with a birthday concert on 11 June; she wrote in *The Guardian* about the programme for the event, and also about the experience – beneficial for her – of being diagnosed in middle age as autistic; see

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2026/jun/08/composer-sally-beamish-birthday-autism-diagnosis>.

SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND AREA MEETING

**Minutes of Area Meeting held on Monday 13 April 2026
at Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House and by remote videoconferencing**

2026/04/01 Worship and introductions

During opening worship we heard a reading on the right holding of our meetings for worship for business, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 3.05 & 3.06 (among other sections), which outline our uniquely Quaker approach to business by gathering together under the guidance of the spirit to listen deeply to each other, give space between contributions and discern the way forward and collectively make decisions.

...

[The full minutes are included in both the print edition of Sesame, and in the PDF emailed to Members and Attenders on the circulation list, but are redacted in this publicly available version. – Editor]

[Redacted]

[*Redacted*]

2026/04/12 Closing Minute

56 Friends (51 members and 5 attenders) have been at all or part of this meeting either in person or on Zoom.

Local meeting attendance is indicated below:

Central Edinburgh 22 + 2 Attenders	Central Fife 2	East Lothian 3	Falkirk & Polmont 2	Kelso 4
Penicuik 1	Portobello & Musselburgh 7 + 2 Attenders	South Edinburgh 10	Tweeddale 1 Attender	<i>Visitors/Others</i> -

We record our thanks to Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House staff for their work and support today. We thank David Sterratt and Violet Grothey for managing the Zoom today.

We meet again for an all-day meeting on Saturday 11 July 2026 in Kelso, starting at 11am.

(Signed)

Sara Davies, Clerk

Jacqueline Noltingk, Assistant Clerk this time

QUAKER MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP IN SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

Contact details of named Friends are in the Book of Members. 'QMH' = Quaker Meeting House

MEETING IN PERSON

Berwick-upon-Tweed – SEE PAGE 3 – St Aidan's Hall, Church St, Berwick, TD14 1DX
On the 2nd Sunday in the month at 4.30 pm. Tea beforehand at 4.00

Central Edinburgh – QMH, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh EH1 2JL

Sundays at 9.30 & 11.00 am. Tea & coffee afterwards; soup and bread & cheese lunch, 12.30.

Wednesday, 12.30–1.00 pm. Tea & coffee; you may bring your own lunch.

Contact the office for updates.

Central Fife – The Old Kirk, Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy KY1 1EH

On the 2nd, 4th & 5th Sundays at 10.30 am. On 1st Sundays, also at 10.30 am, at

Linburn Scout Hall, Abbey View, Dunfermline KY11 4HA.

Contact **Laura Pearson** for further information.

East Lothian – Dunbar Town House, 79 High Street, Dunbar, EH42 1ER

On the 1st, 2nd & last Sundays of the month at 10.45am. Worship on 1st Sundays is all-age; there is a children's meeting on the last Sundays. Contact **Phil Lucas** for updates.

Falkirk & Polmont – Polmont Community Hub, Greenpark Dr., Polmont FK2 0TZ

Sundays, 10.30. Contact **Denise Marshall** if bringing children; **Anna Levin** for updates.

Kelso – QMH, Abbey Row, Kelso TD5 7JF

Sundays at 10.30 am. Contact **Anne Macnaughton** for updates.

North Edinburgh worship group – 4th Sunday in the month at 7.00 pm, meeting in Friends' homes. Contact **Tony Gross** or **Rufus Reade** for further information.

Penicuik – For confirmation of the venue, contact penicuikquakers@hutcheson.org.uk

1st Sundays at 11.00 am – contact **Mark Hutcheson** for updates and further information.

Portobello & Musselburgh – Bellfield, 16B Bellfield Street, Portobello EH15 2BP

On the 2nd and 4th Sundays at 10.30 am (note new time), with a children's meeting.

1st Sundays: Evening meeting at Bellfield, 7.00 pm; NO children's meeting.

3rd and (when there is one) 5th Sundays: Hollies Community Hub, 183 High Street, Musselburgh EH21 7DE, 7.00 pm. Contact **Robin Liebmman**, **Sarah Martin** or **Marian Willoner** for further information, portymussclerks@gmail.com.

South Edinburgh – The Open Door, 420 Morningside Road, Edinburgh EH10 5HY

Sundays, 10.30 am. For information contact the clerking team, sedclerks@gmail.com.

Tweeddale – 2nd Tuesdays, at 7.30 pm, and 4th Sundays at 10.30 am, meeting in Friends' homes. For further information contact **Lesley Morrison**

MEETING BY ZOOM

Central Edinburgh – for login details contact centraledinburgh@quaker.org.uk

Every Sunday at 9.30 am ONLY (blended with the meetings in person).

Central Fife – for login details contact **Laura Pearson**

Every Sunday at 10.30 am; blended with the meeting in person on 1st, 2nd, 4th & 5th.

Penicuik – available if requested in advance – for details contact **Mark Hutcheson**

South Edinburgh – for login details contact sedclerks@gmail.com.

Sundays at 10.30 am, blended with meetings in person.

1st Thursdays at 7.30 pm (online only). Meeting for worship (30 mins) followed by chat.