



# Handbook for registering officers

for marriage in Britain Yearly Meeting of  
the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

**Sections 4 and 13 updated June 2024**

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# Introduction

“Marriage has a special status in Quaker practice. From the very beginning – for longer even than membership – Friends have regarded marriage as a state so momentous that it requires an explicit, solemn enactment in a meeting for worship. Friends understand marriage to be equally available to same-sex and opposite-sex couples.”

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.03 (2015)

This handbook is issued to all Quaker registering officers for marriage in Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. This update builds on previous editions and takes account of the legal changes that have been implemented including equal marriage, and 2022 changes to the procedures for registering marriages legally, as well as removing the term overseer. This edition is also greatly informed by feedback and soundings taken at the regular registering officer conferences, training given to new registering officers, and correspondence between registering officers and Yearly Meeting staff over the years. It should be read in conjunction with the current version of Chapter 16 of *Quaker faith & practice*. All registering officers should make certain that they have and are using the up-to-date version of Chapter 16 (see ‘Contacts’ in section 21).

The quotations in this handbook from Chapter 16 of *Quaker faith & practice* are taken from the version approved by Yearly Meeting 2015 and subsequent changes which is available online here <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/16>.

The handbook covers marriages that take place in England, Wales and Scotland. Marriages in the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are comparatively rare, so registering officers in these areas should seek advice from Yearly Meeting staff. Marriages in Northern Ireland are in the care of Ireland Yearly Meeting.

Periodic updates of sections will be issued as needed by Yearly Meeting staff.

Where the handbook suggests consulting the Recording Clerk or Yearly Meeting staff, please contact Michael Booth in the first instance as he is the prime staff member to contact on any marriage matters. Queries on any matters not covered should also be referred to Michael Booth. He will refer to the Recording Clerk where appropriate.

For more information please contact Michael Booth, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ; email [michaelsb@quaker.org.uk](mailto:michaelsb@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1023.

This handbook, and other information for registering officers, can be accessed from the Quakers in Britain/BYM website; go to [www.quaker.org.uk/ro](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ro).

## Glossary of terms

Throughout the handbook there is frequently a distinction made between Quaker processes and civil processes:

**Civil marriage certificate** – the copy of the register entry issued to the couple by the local registration service after the marriage has been registered, which is used by the couple as proof of their marriage for banks, pensions, etc.

**Civil or legal register** – the legal register that records that the marriage has taken place. An official copy of the entry of a marriage is generally referred to as a civil marriage certificate. The local registration services enter information into the legal register, taking the information from the completed marriage schedule.

**Civil paperwork** – this includes the paperwork dealt with by the civil authorities: the application process, the issue of the marriage schedule before the wedding and then the civil marriage certificate which can be applied for after the wedding has taken place.

**District registrar** – the civil post responsible for the registration of births, deaths and marriages in Scotland.

**Local Registration Service** – we use this term to describe the organisation which supports the work of the district or superintendent registrar. A local registration service generally covers one or more local authority areas.

**Marriage Schedule** – issued by the registrar to the couple getting married. It should be returned to the registrar after the marriage has taken place, so that the marriage can be entered into the civil or legal register and a marriage certificate can be issued.

**Meeting house** – this term is used in some places in this document to indicate the venue of a Quaker wedding, even if it is not actually a Friends meeting house.

**Quaker marriage certificate** – the large written certificate signed by the couple and all who were present at the meeting for worship for marriage

**Registering officer** – the Quaker role appointed by area meeting. Sometimes this post is referred to as the “Quaker registering officer” to make it clear that we are not referring to a local registration service official.

**Superintendent registrar** – the civil post responsible for the registration of births, deaths and marriages in England and Wales.

# 1. The meaning of Quaker marriage

“For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests’ or magistrates’; for it is God’s ordinance and not man’s; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord’s work, and we are but witnesses.”

George Fox, 1669

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.01

In 1753 Quakers were given the right to conduct marriages in England and Wales. We welcome and cherish this privilege.

This privilege, to conduct marriages according to Quaker usage, was granted because early Friends realised the importance of recording marriages that had taken place in a meeting for worship and also their responsibility for reporting such marriages to the authorities. They instituted four principles that underpin Quaker marriage procedures to this day:

- adequate preliminaries
- an open and public ceremony including declarations and the signing of a certificate
- an efficient method of registration
- to reflect current marriage procedures and regulations as set out in law.

It is these principles that are seen as essential as far as statute law in England and Wales is concerned and they should be kept constantly in mind. They are also the principles that Friends in Britain followed in relation to the evolving progress towards equal marriage procedures for same-sex and opposite-sex couples, as set out in the 2009 Yearly Meeting Gathering Minute.

A meeting for worship appointed for the solemnisation of a marriage is held in the same form and spirit as a Quaker meeting for worship at any other time. It is an occasion when those being married may gain inspiration and help from the meeting, which may continue to be a source of strength to them and for those attending an opportunity to ask God’s blessing on the marriage and to support it with their presence and through their prayers and thoughts (based on *Quaker faith & practice* 16.04).

It is an opportunity for outreach as many attending the wedding may be unfamiliar with worship based on silence. Thus it is important that a number of Friends are present who come with heart and mind prepared for the spiritual nature of the occasion.

“Quaker marriage is not an alternative form of marriage available to the general public, but is for members and those who, whilst not being in formal membership, are in unity with its religious nature and witness. The Marriage Acts relating to England and Wales requires this and our criteria apply equally in Scotland.”

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.17

## 2. The application process

See *Quaker faith & practice* 16.25–32

A period of at least ten weeks and preferably six or more months between the first meeting of the registering officer and the couple and the date of the intended marriage is preferred. Applicants should understand that arrangements for Quaker marriages must proceed in good order and cannot be rushed.

The application process is recorded through the completion of the Quaker marriage forms A–H, which are available from Yearly Meeting staff (see section 21: Contacts) and on the BYM website, and referred to in the sections below.

### 2.1 The first meeting with the registering officer

Upon receiving notice that a couple wishes to be married in a Quaker wedding, the registering officer arranges to meet with the couple first, to explore the background to the relationship and marriage process with them, and to give them Form A, or direct them to the online version, as part of that meeting. This first meeting is especially important and the venue should provide complete privacy and a relaxed atmosphere. Registering officers are frequently helped by the presence of their assistant registering officer, spouse or other Friend.

The following questions are likely to be raised in this first meeting (or some will be more appropriate for a meeting for clearness if that is to take place – see section 12: Meetings for clearness):

1. What is each applicant's connection with the Society of Friends?
2. How long have the applicants known each other?
3. Has either been married before? Has there been a recent bereavement? Are there surviving children of previous relationships? Is each applicant legally and emotionally "clear" of previous relationships, and have such matters been discussed between the applicants? (The registering officer will need at an early stage to be assured that the couple have access to the relevant divorce, dissolution or death certificates: this is to ensure that the couple have the necessary paperwork when giving notice.)
4. Are there supportive family backgrounds or alternatively are there family conditions which the applicants need to share with each other (or with the registering officer) before the wedding?
5. Why is a Quaker wedding (as opposed to another form of marriage) being sought?
6. What does each applicant feel about Friends' testimonies which relate to marriage? Is each ready to make the declaration in the form required? Do they understand that a marriage is contracted from the point the declarations are made?

It is especially important to ascertain why a 'Quaker' request has been made. Some registering officers suggest the couple read chapter 16 of *Quaker faith & practice* prior to



the meeting which ensures a deeper discussion, as the couple will have had the opportunity to give time to and maybe discuss the spiritual dimension to the marriage.

The Quaker testimonies value marriage as a life-long commitment to each other with the promises made in the sight of God: George Fox said that “marriage is the Lord’s work: we marry none.” These promises are made with divine assistance and each person present becoming a witness. The Quaker meeting also agree to support the marriage in whatever way they are able ensuring the couple become part of that caring community. It is also important to remind the couple of the legal nature of marriage. A Quaker wedding is both a religious and state ceremony, and there is responsibility to ensure understanding of both aspects.

It will be helpful to explain to the couple the form of the meeting for worship arranged for the solemnisation of the marriage so that the couple are aware of their own responsibilities and the decisions they need to make for the procedures to follow smoothly. Most applicants will not have attended a Quaker wedding so the registering officer should spend some time describing this in general terms. The date planned should be noted and, especially if it is to take place at a busy meeting house or other venue, early booking may be necessary.

At this first meeting too, the expectation or possibility of a meeting for clearness should be raised (see Section 12), depending on the practices of the area meeting. Where a meeting for clearness is part of the standard preparation for marriage, some of the questions and topics shown above may be more appropriate for the meeting for clearness.

The registering officer will use the opportunity of the first meeting to consider, first, whether there are likely to be any special points that will need to be brought to the attention of the local meeting or elders or those concerned with pastoral care, and second, whether there are matters that will have to be addressed with the couple in the period before the wedding. It is important that in this first meeting the registering officer should listen carefully to the couple, who should describe in their own words what they are planning for the occasion. This will help the registering officer to see where there might be any conflict with Quaker practice or testimonies. Quaker testimonies are significant in making arrangements for the marriage, such as simplicity, which is worthy of discussion for it impacts on the plans for wedding attire, decoration in the meeting house and outward signs of ostentation.

If the couple have not attended a Quaker wedding before, and there is an opportunity for them to do so, either within the area meeting or in a nearby one, then this possibility should be followed up with the registering officer of the area meeting where a wedding is to take place.

Where one of the couple is in membership or is a regular attender in another area meeting, it is good practice and a courtesy for the registering officer of the area meeting where the marriage is to take place to make contact to keep the other meeting informed of the marriage preparations.

Quakers do not charge couples for marriages, which is unusual but something the Society has long held to be important for equality and fairness. However, some couples ask about making a donation, and some registering officers are quite explicit about the

financial needs of meetings or meeting houses and may refer to the list of parochial fees made by the Church of England (see [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org) and search for parochial fees). It is up to each registering officer if, how and when s/he wishes to raise this, but it is mentioned here in the context of the first meeting since it may come up then.

(See also section 13.2 for Applicants with lesser connection to the Society, and section 13.1 for Remarriage of divorced persons.)

(See section 11 for Time and place of meeting for worship.)

## 2.2 Form A – the initial application

### *Quaker faith & practice* 16.26

This is the first document giving the registering officer the information required to initiate the marriage procedures. It will usually be given to the couple at the first meeting with the registering officer, and they will return it, completed, as soon as they can. Names must be completed in full.

Some of the information on this form will be used by the registering officer when completing the marriage returns, which form part of the Yearly Meeting records. The occupations of the parents are essential, even if they are retired or deceased. The witnesses on this form do not need to be associated with Quakers; they are solely witnessing the signature.

In England and Wales, up to four parents can be included on the civil paperwork for each person getting married. This can include step-parents. If more than two are to be included, then please ask for the same information for these people.

All information as to names, occupations, etc. should be the same as will be given to the superintendent or district registrar at the time when notice of marriage is given. If any particulars change during the run-up to the wedding, such as occupation, the applicants should inform the registering officer.

Once Form A has been received, it is useful for the registering officer to do a timeline working background from the date of the wedding, and noting, for instance, when area meetings take place – especially important since many area meetings do not meet every month.

There will normally be at least three meetings with the couple, more if a meeting for clearness takes place. The registering officer should also make sure that elders within the meeting where the wedding is to take place are involved from this early stage; if the couple have not already made contact with the elders of the meeting in which (and under whose care) the marriage is to take place, they and the registering officer should do so as soon as Form A has been completed.

### 2.2.1 Key facts

This document is designed to help the registering officer keep track of the whole process. Some of the entries are designed as prompts for conversations with the couple to ensure that nothing is forgotten, others are to check that the Quaker and civil requirements are met. The registering officer does not have to use these pages.

## 2.3 Form B/C – for applicants not in membership

### *Quaker faith & practice 16.27*

When one or both of the applicants is not in formal membership of the Society of Friends, they will be required to complete Form B/C, which should be given to the applicant(s) at the same time as Form A (if two non-members are marrying then two Forms B/C will be used, otherwise just one Form B/C). Usually the non-member will be marrying a member of the Society of Friends, or will be in regular attendance at a meeting. (If both applicants are non-members with lesser connections to the Society of Friends, see section 13.2.) Bear in mind that some applicants may believe themselves to be in formal membership when they are not, for example, if they grew up in a Quaker household. If an applicant states that membership of the Society of Friends is held in another area meeting or country, confirmation from that area meeting or yearly meeting must be obtained by the registering officer.

In the case of non-members/attenders, Part I of Form B/C is completed by the non-member and given to the two adult Friends (in membership) who will meet with the applicant and satisfy themselves that the non-member is fully aware of the significance of a marriage according to the manner of Friends and is in sympathy with Friends' principles concerning marriage. The two Friends then complete part II. This signing can also be part of a meeting for clearness (see section 12).

The registering officer is responsible for granting permission to non-members to marry in a Quaker ceremony, and this will depend on his or her conversation with them, possible previous knowledge, but especially on the signatures of two adult Friends on Form(s) B/C. These should be Friends in good standing and not relatives of either of the couple. Although it is in order for the same Friends to sign both forms (in the case of two non-members marrying) the registering officer may wish to encourage each applicant to have different Friends sign Forms B/C. These signatures confirm that the Friends have discussed the applicants' request with them and are satisfied that the applicants are in unity with the Society's testimony as to the nature of marriage. It is helpful if the Friends signing the forms are known to the registering officer, and it is appropriate for the registering officer to discuss with the couple the names of Friends they might approach. It is preferred that these Friends are from the local meeting which will be upholding the marriage and where the meeting for worship will be appointed. But it has to be recognised that, in the world where people move around with jobs and family commitments, there is a strong possibility that the registering officer will not know the signatory Friends. In this event the registering officer may like to consider making an informal contact with those Friends.

## 2.4 Form D – granting of permission of non-members

This form is not needed for marriages in Scotland

*Quaker faith & practice 16.29 and 16.33*

If the marriage is to take place in England or Wales and if either or both of the couple to be married is not in membership, providing the registering officer agrees to the intended marriage, the registering officer will issue Form D, which is essential to the furtherance of the legal process (see section 2.7). Form D is the registering officer's certificate, as required by the Marriage Act, to be produced by a non-member giving notice of the marriage to the superintendent registrar.

If the couple are going to give notice to the superintendent registrar/district registrar together, one copy for each of the couple not in membership will suffice. If they will be giving notice separately, then they will each need one copy in respect of each of the couple not in membership (i.e. for a couple, neither of whom is in membership, who will be giving notice separately, a total of four Forms D will be needed). The forms must be signed by a registering officer of the Society of Friends (i.e. not an assistant or deputy). To assist the superintendent registrar, we have included at the bottom of form D the following: "A certificate is not required/has also been issued (delete as required) for the person they are planning to marry." Do not forget to delete the inappropriate part of that statement.

It should be said that superintendent registrars vary in their familiarity with Form D, which is only ever used for Quaker marriage, so many will never have come across one before. Some will retain it (which is what they should do), but some may give it back to the couple.

Some superintendent registrars assume that a Form D is needed for **members** of the Society of Friends. It is not. Since Quaker marriages are comparatively rare, such confusion is understandable. It is helpful for the registering officer to make contact with the superintendent registrar(s) where the couple will be giving notice before the appointment, or to be available by phone when the appointment(s) take place.

Alternatively, it may be helpful for members of the Society of Friends to have with them a piece of paper which says simply "I, <name> declare that I am a member of <name of> area/monthly meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and I am applying to marry under the provisions of section 47(2)(a) of the 1949 Marriage Act". This should only be offered to the superintendent registrar if they ask for a Form D and don't accept that one is not necessary for a member. (See also section 10.1.)

## 2.5 Form E – public notice of intention

*Quaker faith & practice 16.31*

Although due notice of the marriage will be posted for public inspection in the superintendent registrar's office before the issuing of the marriage schedule, Section 47 of the Marriage Act 1949 stipulates that marriages according to the usage of the Society

of Friends are valid only if they are conducted “in pursuance of a general rule of the said Society” and public notice of intention is part of our ‘general rule’. Thus the requirement to issue a public notice of intention is essential to the maintenance of right ordering in the conduct of marriages according to Quaker usage. It also means that the meeting under whose care the wedding will take place are aware of the plans.

After Form D (if required) has been issued to the couple, the registering officer will send a copy of Form E to each of the meetings where the applicants are members or usually worship, or in the case of non-members, to the meeting nearest the applicant’s place of residence (even if the individual is not known to the meeting), and also to the meeting where the marriage is to take place (if different). The person who reads this out (usually the clerk) after meeting for worship signs it and returns it to the registering officer. Since marriages are comparatively rare occurrences in the lives of most meetings, it is worth the registering officer being in contact with the clerk(s) beforehand to let them know to expect this form and what to do with it.

Sending Form E by email is fine, but you need to be sure that it has been received by the clerk or other person who will be reading it out. An email acknowledgement that Form E has been read is acceptable.

If one or both of the applicants is resident outside Great Britain, time must be allowed for the notice of intention to be read in the country concerned. Discretion is allowed, however. If an applicant is not a member and has not been in contact with Friends in their own country, or where there are only a small or very widespread number of Friends in that country, the registering officer may consider that there is little value in sending the notice of intention to that country. Please consult the Recording Clerk if this seems to be the case.

There is no set time limit within which an objection should be made. It would seem reasonable to allow a full week and a day: so if you give notice on a Sunday, then allow for objections until the end of the following Monday.

It is provided in *Quaker faith & practice* 16.31 that if a registering officer receives any notice of objection to the marriage, the registering officer shall immediately inform the couple. What other action might be required will depend on the nature of the objection. If the objection indicates a possible legal impediment to the marriage (e.g. the couple are not free to marry because of blood relationship, age, or because they are not free of other marriage engagements) then, if the couple have already given notice to the superintendent registrar or district registrar, the registering officer will contact the registrar, who will make the decision as to whether the marriage may proceed. If the objection relates to questions of unsuitability or suggests that the couple should not be married according to the usage of our Society, then the registering officer will wish to consult with officers of the area meeting and, perhaps, other Friends in good standing, before deciding whether the marriage should proceed. In all cases the couple will be kept informed and the objector notified of the decision.

See section 13.5 for more guidance.



## 2.6 Form F – Request for appointment of a meeting for worship for marriage

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.41–45

It is normally the area meeting which appoints the meeting for worship for marriage (unless this has been formally delegated to a local meeting (16.43)). An area meeting can only delegate this task if the local meeting holds a meeting for worship weekly, to appoint meetings for worship for the solemnisation of marriage at its usual venue.

The request for the appointment of the meeting for worship is sent by the registering officer on Form F as soon as possible after Forms A (and B/C if required) have been completed, Form D issued (if required), and Form E completed and returned to the registering officer. Form F can be sent before Form E has been received back by the registering officer.

It is helpful if the couple and/or the registering officer have spoken beforehand with elders of the local meeting where the marriage is to take place, since, although the area meeting appoints the meeting for worship, local elders are responsible for the right holding of meetings for worship within their local meeting and so need to know well in advance that it is taking place. The area meeting will want to be assured that there will be sufficient local Friends attending to ensure that the meeting for worship is properly held.

Once the meeting for worship has been appointed, the clerk will return part II giving confirmation and the registering officer sends Part III to the couple advising them of the decision.

Sample minute:

*We have received a request from our registering officer to appoint a meeting for worship for the solemnisation of the marriage of [name 1], (a member of [name of AM] area meeting/not in membership\*) and [name 2], (a member of [name of AM] area meeting/not in membership\*) to be held at [place of intended marriage] on [date] at [time]. We agree that this marriage may take place at the time and place requested. We appoint [names of Friends] to attend.*

*\*delete as appropriate*

If the between-meetings procedure needs to be used (*Quaker faith & practice* 16.44–45) then the clerk of the relevant meeting should give their decision in writing (an email is acceptable). The registering officer should not rely on verbal agreement. This between meetings agreement should be minuted at the next business meeting.

## 2.7 Obtaining the legal/civil authority to marry

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.33

Everyone getting married must give notice of their intention and obtain the legal authority to do so.

### 2.7.1 Marriage in England and Wales

If the marriage is to be solemnised in England and Wales, at least one of the couple must be resident in England or Wales for at least seven clear days before giving notice. If both live in England or Wales, each must give notice in person to the superintendent registrar (or deputy) for the district in which they each live. If one lives in Scotland, that person may give notice in Scotland and obtain a certificate of no impediment, which serves the same purpose as the superintendent registrar's certificate. There is no provision for a person living in Northern Ireland to give notice there; that person will have to establish seven clear days' residence in England or Wales before giving notice in the district of residence. There is, however, provision for one of the couple living in the Channel Islands, Isle of Man, or other Commonwealth country to give notice there, providing the other person is resident in England or Wales.

For same-sex couples, the superintendent registrar may require proof that a religious body is willing to for their marriage to take place. We have prepared a simple single sided letter that applies to all couples and that can be downloaded from [quaker.org.uk/ro](http://quaker.org.uk/ro) or accessed by the superintendent registrar. The Registrar General has issued guidance to all superintendent registrars advising that Quakers will conduct same-sex marriages, but some couples may need to provide this extra confirmation.

The couple can attend to give notice together (if they live in the same district) or separately. Special arrangements apply – and the couple will have to give notice together – if either of them is subject to immigration control. If the couple live in different local registration districts (most registration districts cover a local authority area) at the time of giving notice, each will need an appointment with the superintendent registrar of the district in which they live. They must take any documentation required by the superintendent registrar (this is listed on the local authority website, or guidance will be given over the phone when the appointment is arranged). Their notices will not be taken without all the documentation required. Some local authorities have waiting lists of up to a month or more for such appointments, so it is important that that the appointment is booked early in the process. There is a fee of £35<sup>1</sup> per person. Where one or both of the couple are not in membership, they will also have to take Form(s) D with them. The couple do not have to have decided at this stage who will witness their marriage.

When giving notice, the superintendent registrar may not be able to find the address of the place where the marriage is to take place in their computer system. It is apparently possible for a place to be entered manually into the system but telling a superintendent registrar how to override their computer system may take some tact.

According to section 26(1)(c) of the Marriage Act 1949, there is no restriction as to the location of a Quaker marriage. This may not be immediately remembered by the registrar taking notice, as few Quaker marriages take place. Therefore, any such constraints have been placed by the Religious Society of Friends itself, as described in *Quaker faith & practice* 16.46.

After 28 clear days' notice, the relevant superintendent registrar who covers the area where the marriage is to take place, which may not be the same area where notice was given, will issue the legal authority for the marriage. This will be a marriage schedule. The

couple may have to arrange to collect the schedule or to have it posted to them. However, some superintendent registrars may post it directly to the registering officer. The couple should therefore make sure that have the registering officer's postal address with them when they give notice.

The schedule is valid for a year from the date of issue.

### **2.7.2 Marriage in Scotland**

Each person intending to marry in Scotland must complete and submit notice forms (which can be done by post) to the registrar for the district in which the marriage or civil partnership is to take place. Legally, the couple do not have to live in Scotland to marry there (although the registering officer should be sure that they are marrying in the care of the meeting). The necessary forms can be downloaded from the internet or obtained from any registrar in Scotland (see section 20: Contacts). The couple will need to provide their birth certificates and such other documents as may be required by the registrar. If the documents are not available at the time of giving notice and if time is short, notice should be given first and the documents provided at a later date. Notice cannot be given more than three months before the intended date of the marriage. Four weeks (or six weeks if either person has been married or in a civil partnership before) should normally be allowed for the necessary checks to be made, but the absolute minimum period of notice is 29 days. The fee for giving notice is £30<sup>2</sup> per person. The couple should have decided which two people will witness the marriage and sign the schedule.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is a prescribed body under the Same Sex Marriage (Prescribed Bodies) (Scotland) Regulations 2014, which means that we can conduct same-sex marriages in Scotland.

After a minimum of 29 clear days the district registrar, providing they are satisfied that the couple are free to marry, will issue the schedule for the marriage. This schedule cannot be issued earlier than seven days before the intended date of the marriage, and is valid for three months from the date of giving notice. One of the couple must collect the schedule in person – it will not be issued to any third party.

1 Accurate in August 2021

2 Accurate in August 2021

### **2.7.3 The paperwork required by the registering officer before a marriage**

So that the registering officer is clear that the marriage can take place legitimately, the marriage schedule should be in the hands of the Quaker registering officer at least one working day before the wedding. Most registering officers prefer to receive these earlier than 24 hours beforehand in case of any problems.

The schedule is not in itself the legal document which registers the marriage – it contains the information needed for the local registration service to register the marriage.

In England and Wales, certain corrections to the schedule can be made. See section 5.2.1 for more details.

The schedule may have printed upon it various rules and regulations about the wording



to be used in a marriage ceremony and also about the venue of a marriage. These rules and regulations can safely be ignored as they do not apply to Quaker marriages.

The registering officer should check that the schedule is in date, that it shows the correct venue, that the names of the couple are correct, and that the schedule has been properly issued by the (superintendent) registrar. The registering officer must bring the schedule to the wedding.

In Scotland, the schedule must be returned to the registrar within three days of the marriage for the marriage to be registered.

In England and Wales more time is allowed for the return of the schedule: but please don't delay!

If the date of the wedding changes after the schedule has been issued, this can be amended on the schedule. But the wedding must take place during the validity of the schedule, otherwise new notice must be given. Please note too that the new date will need to be approved by the usual Quaker process, Quaker faith & practice 16.42 and 16.43 describe how this can be done by the appropriate clerk. Generally, it will need to be the area meeting clerk that formally approves the change of date.

## 2.8 Form G: Public notice of the meeting for worship for marriage

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.47

The two points of principle behind this section are:

- that the notice shall be as public as possible
- that a reasonable time should elapse between the giving of public notice and the day of solemnisation.

Thus, if a marriage is to take place on a Saturday, public notice should be given on the previous Sunday, and if there is a midweek meeting for worship, after that too. Before sending Form G to the local meeting clerk, the registering officer should be satisfied, by phone, email or otherwise, that the meeting clerk intends to be at meeting for worship on the day(s) in question and that the importance of public notice is appreciated: it may be wise to ask for a confirmatory phone call before the written notice. If by mischance public notice is not given, the registering officer should get in touch immediately with the Recording Clerk, who will advise whether there are ways of overcoming the difficulty this might include emailing members of the meeting.

Where there is any doubt at all about Form G being read at the close of the usual meeting for worship last held before the day of solemnisation, it is a useful precaution to ensure that a notice giving details of the intended meeting for worship for the solemnisation of the marriage is posted on the meeting house noticeboard or door. Particular care should be taken where meetings for worship are held less frequently than weekly. Confirmation of this reading will be returned to the registering officer in time for the wedding.

If the marriage is to take place at a venue where meetings for worship are not normally held, then please contact the Recording Clerk for details of a form that could be displayed at the venue. However, a Form G should also be read at a nearby meeting.

While it is obligatory for registering officers to ensure that public notice is given in this way, it is in the spirit of both points above to ensure that local Friends are as well-informed as possible about a future wedding in their meeting, at least as soon as the meeting for worship is appointed by the area meeting. It is as well to make sure that the couple are involving local meeting elders in the arrangements as soon as possible.

It will be helpful for the registering officer, the couple and the local meeting where the marriage will be celebrated to hold a meeting two to three weeks prior to the marriage at the meeting house to make all the practical arrangements for the occasion and to ensure good communications are in place (see also section 20: Checklists). At this meeting the registering officer should also check the couple have not moved house or changed jobs since the schedule was issued – these details must be accurate at the time of the marriage.

Now go to section 3: The meeting for worship.

### 3 The meeting for worship

The registering officer should meet with the couple to help them plan the format of the wedding. Every wedding is different, it is a special day and the wishes of the couple should be considered sympathetically. There are checklists in section 20 and the Key facts forms to help registering officers make sure that subjects have been covered.

Local elders will need to be involved in or informed of some of these decisions such as:

- who will be responsible for introducing the meeting for worship – this is important as many present will not have been to a Quaker meeting before. The registering officer, a local elder or another Friend may do this.
- the likely duration of the meeting.
- the likely number of guests, bearing in mind the capacity of the meeting house (and its fire certificate limit), and the need to leave space for local and area meeting Friends to attend.
- decoration of the meeting house.
- the point in the meeting when the Quaker certificate of marriage is to be signed and read.
- arrangements for children.
- which Friends will be responsible for indicating the conclusion of the meeting by the shaking of hands.
- refreshments.

There may be some variation in practice from one wedding to another in respect of the entry of the couple, the time of reading of the certificate, etc. This is acceptable provided that the legal requirements are followed rigorously. Local elders should be involved in any discussions about programming of the meeting for worship (for example, planned ministry or the use of music).

Quaker weddings are often attended by relatives and friends who have no previous experience of a meeting for worship, and it is helpful to do as much preparation as possible. The couple may feel it is helpful to send copies of leaflets about meeting for worship and Quaker weddings, available from the BYM website or the Quaker Centre at Friends House, to invited guests. Alternatively they may choose to send a letter in their own words, with the invitation, telling guests of the form of worship, the procedure, and what is expected of them. Some couples set up websites to keep their guests in touch with the preparations and including links to the leaflets or other information on Quaker weddings from the BYM website.

It is important to remember that weddings are family affairs and that if the couple wish, the wider family (especially any children of the couple) may wish to be involved in the planning of the wedding. This is especially the case where one family are Quakers and one is not, to be sure that the non-Quaker family is not excluded from the process.

It is now common practice for elders, in consultation with the couple, to arrange for a Friend (usually the registering officer) to give a short explanation of the proceedings at the outset of the meeting, but if careful preparation is made beforehand this might not be

felt to be necessary. It is, however, usually necessary to remind those present to turn off mobile phones, and that filming, photography or using social media is not appropriate during the meeting for worship.

Since the pandemic of 2021-21, when many Quaker meetings set up online worship, and many have continued with blended worship (online and in person worship), some couples may wish to have a blended meeting for worship for marriage, which allows friends and relatives who are unable to travel to the wedding to participate (not just observe). This will not be possible in every venue. A request for a blended meeting should be made in good time to allow practical arrangements to be made. Elders have responsibility for the right holding of Meetings for Worship (including marriages) so they will need to be involved in the planning of the meeting for worship.

There is also the question of how the couple will come into the meeting and where they will sit. It used to be common practice for the couple to enter when everyone else was gathered and for the assembled company to stand in greeting. Now it is more common for the couple to come into the meeting along with others and without formality. In cases where the couple enter after others have assembled, many now prefer that the meeting does not stand. The registering officer should also discuss whether to enter the meeting with the couple or separately.

The significance of making the declaration to each other is most important as this is the essential element in the meeting for worship, the promise made to each other with the wording as described in *Quaker faith & practice* 16.52–54 and following the instruction: “taking each other by the hand”. The couple may use a prompt card with their promise written upon it or they may decide to read from the Quaker certificate which will be placed on a table in front of them in the meeting house. They rise to make their promise, at a time that they feel ready and when the meeting is gathered in silence. Frequently this is towards the beginning of the meeting for worship and is usually followed by further ministry after a suitable time for reflection and prayerful contemplative thought for the couple has elapsed. Some couples like to exchange rings or give a ring at this point. There is no provision made for this as part of the declaration but can be a significant and meaningful symbolic act and there is nothing to prevent it taking place.

It is sometimes helpful if the registering officer briefs one of the elders to have some ministry in mind, especially if a Quaker meeting for worship will be a new experience for a significant number of the wedding guests. The couple themselves may also have ideas of readings they would like to be included as part of the ministry, but this should follow, never precede, the declarations. Such ministry could be readings by friends, or personal statements by the couple themselves amplifying their commitment to each other and to their marriage. Ministry by the couple or by others in close relation with them can deepen and confirm the solemn support for the marriage given by all who are present. Tactful guidance may be necessary but remember that “it is the Lord’s work” and the couple may be the best judges of what is appropriate for their wedding.

The words of the declaration (see section 4), with the permitted alternatives, have been laid down by Britain Yearly Meeting, and must be adhered to. No other changes to the wording, however slight, may be allowed unless approved by the Recording Clerk.

The registering officer will ensure that there is adequate discussion with the couple, and

with the clerk and the elders of the meeting concerned, on practical issues. Some comments on specific points are given in section 21. On the day of the marriage the registering officer may be helped by having a checklist of things to take and may, on arrival, wish to go through a number of points to make assurance doubly sure (see section 20: Checklists). These should, however, be no more than a final confirmation of points already understood.

The registering officer should not feel pressurised into any arrangements either by the couple or by their families. Support from the local elders and/or the registering officer's support group should be sought if this is the case.

## 4. The declaration

### 4.1 The purpose and use of the declaration

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.52–54

The public declaration by the couple is the main essential feature of a Quaker marriage. The point at which they have both made their declarations is the point at which they are legally married and at which “the Lord’s work” of marrying couples is done.

The registering officer is not empowered to agree any revision of the alternative forms of declaration set out in *Quaker faith & practice* 16.52–53, approved by Britain Yearly Meeting and notified by the Society to the Registrar General. Quaker marriages are valid only if they are conducted in accordance with the general rules of the Society and the public declaration in the form prescribed is clearly part of the general rules.

The declaration must be made in English, except that, in places where the Welsh language is commonly used, a Welsh form of the declaration may be used. This rule is to satisfy the requirement that the public declaration must be heard and understood by witnesses. “If one or other of the couple wishes to make the declaration in any language other than English or Welsh, then that may be done, but the registering officer needs to ensure that an interpreter is present to testify to the words spoken before the certificate is read. In addition, the person concerned should make the declaration to the best of their ability in English or Welsh.” (*Quaker faith & practice* 16.54) The Registrar General suggests that the interpreter should sign the marriage register as a witness, although this is not a legal requirement.

The declaration on the Quaker marriage certificate **must** be written in either Welsh or English. All languages spoken in the declarations must normally be transcribed in full on the certificate. Many registering officers have found it useful to place, conveniently for the couple, cards with the wording of the declaration to be used – these should be in bold lettering with names inserted. The Quaker certificate should record the declarations in the order in which they are to be made.

The registering officer should ensure that when the couple make their declarations they take each other by the hand. If they forget to do this (the holding of hands is referred to in the wording of the Quaker certificate) they can be gently reminded by the registering officer. If one of the couple makes a serious error, the registering officer should ask that the declaration be repeated (perhaps reading from the card or certificate).

The registering officer should check beforehand that the couple each intend to use the same form of declaration. The words required, including the various options that are permissible, are given on the next page.

The wording of the declaration has been agreed by Yearly Meeting. There are some limited possibilities for change, if the couple would like to explore possibilities, please be in touch with Yearly Meeting staff. The phrase “promising through divine assistance/with God’s help” cannot be omitted.

## 4.2 The wording of the declaration

### The marriage declaration (English version)

Compulsory	Choose either or none	Compulsory	Forename	Choose either	Compulsory	Choose one ^
Friends,	In the presence of God	I take this my friend	All forenames	Surname	to be my	spouse,
	Commonly used forename		husband,			
	<blank>		Given name (where an abbreviation of a forename)	<blank>		wife,
	In the fear of the Lord and in the presence of this assembly		Given name (where it is not included in their formal name)			partner in marriage,

<i>Compulsory</i>	<i>Choose either</i>	<i>Compulsory</i>	<i>Choose one</i>	<i>Compulsory</i>	<i>Use the same term as earlier</i> <sup>^</sup>	<i>Choose one</i>
promising,	Through divine assistance	to be unto	him	a loving and faithful	spouse,	so long as we both on earth shall live
	her		husband,			
	with God's help		<i>preferred pronoun</i>		wife,	until it shall please the Lord by death to separate us.
			<i>commonly used forename or given name</i>		partner in marriage, (or marriage partner)	

^ Couples can use partner in marriage the first time and then any of the options the second time, otherwise the both parties must choose the same term both times, apart from mixed-gender marriages, where husband and wife can be used as appropriate. The word 'partner' alone may not be used.

The couple can use the pronouns with which they are most comfortable, even when not the same as the pronouns used in the civil paperwork.

Where Welsh is used, similar options are available.



## 5. Recording of the marriage

### 5.1 The Quaker certificate

*Quaker faith & practice 16.57–60 – this section contains the correct wording for the Quaker certificate*

The Quaker certificate is a record of the proceedings of the marriage, signed by those present when the declarations are made, which passes into the possession of the couple. It does not carry any legal significance and cannot be used as an official certification of a Quaker marriage.

The wording of the certificate has been agreed by Yearly Meeting. There are some limited possibilities for change, if the couple would like to explore possibilities, please be in touch with Yearly Meeting staff.

This is an integral part of the meeting for worship and requires considerable thought and preparation beforehand. The pre-printed Quaker certificate in scroll form can be obtained from the bookshop at Friends House. Registering officers may wish to have a small supply of these, or at least one to show the couple. The couple need to arrange for the completion of the Quaker certificate using their full names and either their address or parentage (i.e. son, daughter or child of...) and include the declaration words the couple have chosen to use and in the order they agree to speak them.

Following the declaration, either straight away or towards the end of the meeting for worship, the registering officer will invite the couple to sign the certificate with their surnames used prior to the marriage, and their two witnesses will also sign. It is wise for the registering officer to have a note of the names of the witnesses in case of illegible signatures as the entire Quaker certificate is then read aloud as a record of the occasion and confirmation that the couple are indeed married.

While the registering officer takes the couple and their witnesses, who may be the same ones who signed the Quaker certificate or different people, to sign the legal marriage schedule elsewhere, those present for the declaration will be invited to sign the large Quaker marriage certificate. It is helpful to have one or two guests appointed to take charge of the signing to ensure everyone has the opportunity of being a witness. The witnesses who sign the civil paperwork must have been present in person.

The registering officer should be prepared to advise the couple on filling in the Quaker certificate and will need to check the wording before the day of the marriage. The couple may prefer to have their own Quaker certificate prepared rather than using the pre-printed one, in which case the registering officer should exercise great care that the wording is correct. Some registering officers have felt it helpful to send the couple the exact wording they should use, after finding out from the couple which of the variations within the declaration they may be using, and which of them will make the declaration first. The words required, including the various options that are permissible, are given at the end of this section.

The certificate used to be available as a printed booklet, in addition to the scroll form. If a couple wishes, they could have their certificate prepared as a booklet.

The full names of each of the couple must be given in the opening section of the certificate. Where one or both of a couple use as their commonly used forename an abbreviation, or a completely different name from their official name, then that can be added, perhaps between inverted commas or brackets or in italics, or after the phrase “known as” or “commonly known as”, either after the first name, or after the name it is abbreviating, or after the surname. The known name may be used in the declaration, and there is no requirement to use the family name in the declarations. The only place the family name must appear is in the opening section..

At all times it should be borne in mind that it must be clear who is marrying whom. In the declaration there are various options for what form of name should be used, which can be found in section 4.

It is good practice that there should be a spoken confirmation by a third party that declarations by the couple have been made: it is for this reason that *Quaker faith & practice* provides that the Quaker certificate be read in the meeting for worship. If the declarations have also been made in a language with which the registering officer is unfamiliar then, if the registering officer so wishes, someone who is confident to read that section of the certificate may do so.

All witnesses signing the Quaker certificate should use pens with permanent black ink. Children may sign or make their mark on the Quaker certificate. Sometimes a parent will write the name of the child, if they are unable to write themselves. Where friends have arrived at the meeting for worship after the couple have made their declarations, they should not sign the front of the Quaker certificate. However, they could sign the back under such words as “We also having been present at the meeting for worship, although after the declarations were made, have subscribed our names the day and year above written”.

In circumstances where friends and family have joined the meeting for worship online, they too may sign the certificate as long as they heard the declarations made. It will be the responsibility of the couple to arrange for these signatures, and to ensure that the integrity of the certificate is maintained and that only those who heard the declarations sign.

Where the declarations are only given in Welsh, then the rest of the certificate should be in Welsh. Where the declarations are made by the couple in Welsh and English then the rest of the certificate can be in either language or both languages.

### 5.1.1 Certificate of marriage: standard English wording

Certificate of marriage <sup>1</sup>

[full name <sup>2</sup> and either <sup>3</sup> address <sup>4</sup> or parentage <sup>5</sup>] and [full name and either address or parentage]\* having made known their intention of taking each other in marriage and public notice of their intention having been given, the proceedings were allowed by the proper officers of . . . . .<sup>6</sup> Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

This is to certify that for the solemnisation of their marriage, [name] and [name] were present at a duly appointed public meeting for worship of the Society at .....<sup>7</sup>  
this ... day of ... month of the year ....<sup>8</sup>

Taking each other by the hand,

[name]<sup>9</sup> ..... declared: <sup>10</sup>

and [name]. ..... declared:

In confirmation of these declarations they have in this meeting signed this certificate of marriage.

.....

.....

We having been present at the above marriage have also subscribed our names as witnesses the day, month and year above written.<sup>11</sup>

.....

.....

### 5.1.2 Certificate of marriage: notes on optional wording

This section contains advice on the optional wording on the certificate of marriage.

1. The heading "Certificate of marriage" is part of the certificate. The printed certificates have the extra phrase "TO BE USED ONLY FOR MARRIAGES CONDUCTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS) IN BRITAIN" here. This is not required on especially created certificates.
2. This means all the person's forenames and their surname. If they would generally also use their name in another script (e.g. Arabic, Chinese, Cyrillic, Hebrew) and they wish to also have their name given in that script, then that is acceptable.
3. The couple should each use the same descriptor: either address or parentage. The purpose of this is to unambiguously identify each person getting married.
4. Addresses do not need to include the postcode, so long as the address is easily identifiable. This might mean that a county is needed. Any address does not need to be written as the post office would expect, writing "Ilford in the county of Essex" or "Leeds in the West Riding of Yorkshire" is fine. Poetry is permitted! If the couple have the same address, then it is only needed to be included once. "AB and CD of.."
5. This could be son, daughter, child of.... If a parent has died, it is not necessary to indicate this on the Quaker certificate. (But it can be if the couple wish). Someone can decide if they wish to use the names of their parents as they were when they were born, or as they are now or for how they were known at some suitable point in time. Using the full names of parents or just a forename and surname is fine.
6. Insert the full name of the Area Meeting that has authorised the wedding (even if the local meeting is permitted to appoint the wedding).

7. Here should be inserted address of meeting house or other place.
8. Dates can be traditional Quaker style, or using the customary names for the month. Numbers can be written using figures or words, according to the wish of the couple.
9. One of the full name, the commonly used forename and surname, all forenames or commonly used forename. Each of the couple should use the same form.
10. The wording of the declarations should be included here, see section 4 for the permitted variants
11. Where people have joined by video link, the final line of the certificate may be changed to one of the following:
  - a) We having been present at the above marriage have also subscribed our names as witnesses
  - b) We are also subscribing our names as witnesses the day, month and year above written.
  - c) We having been present in person or via video call at the above marriage have also subscribed our names as witnesses the day, month and year above written.
  - d) We having been present at the above marriage on the day, month and year above written have also subscribed our names as witnesses.

## 5.2 The marriage schedule

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.61–62

### 5.2.1 Completion of the schedule (England and Wales)

There is helpful guidance on the completion and correction of schedules in the GRO Guide for Authorised Persons (see 21: Contacts and Resources.)

The marriage schedule will be pre-printed, with spaces for signatures of the people involved in the marriage. The schedule is arranged in two columns, with details of each person getting married in each column.

The top of the schedule will give the date by which the marriage must be held. (Note that it gives the final date that the marriage can take place).

Boxes 1 to 7 will already be completed.

You should check the details on the marriage schedule with the couple to ensure they are correct. If the details on the schedule do not match the information given to you by each of the parties to the proposed marriage and the discrepancy does not affect the identity or status of the parties to the marriage, or disclose a legal impediment, then you should correct the marriage schedule before the marriage is solemnized. However, a minor typographical or transcription error, for example the misspelling of an occupation may be corrected after the wedding has taken place, but before the schedule is returned. You should cross through any inaccurate information so that it is still legible, and any correction or addition should be made in registration ink and be initialled by you and the party to the marriage. In cases where the discrepancy relates to the status or identity of the parties and you have decided to go ahead with the marriage, you should write an

explanation of the circumstances on the back of the schedule.

### Completion of Box 8.

When box 8 is completed it should read:

Marriage solemnized according to the usages of the Society of Friends by schedule  
.....(signature)  
.....(name).....  
.....(designation)

You can start to complete Box 8 in advance of the marriage by deleting the words 'rites and ceremonies of', 'in the parish of' and 'by me' and writing in 'the Society of Friends' so that it reads 'Marriage solemnized according to the usages of the Society of Friends by schedule'. Do not sign the schedule before the marriage has taken place.

Then once the marriage has taken place, you can sign box 8 and write in your name and 'Registering Officer' as your designation.

Note – if the registering officer for the area meeting is prevented from attending the marriage, then another Friend should be asked to take responsibility for the marriage and obtaining the signatures of the couple and their witnesses on the day. This could be the assistant or deputy registering officer for the area meeting, or a registering officer from another area meeting, or failing that another experienced and wise Friend, who understands the importance of following the civil and Quaker processes precisely. If in doubt, please consult RCO staff for advice. Do note that this Friend cannot sign box 11.

### Box 9: signatures of the couple getting married.

Please make sure that the couple sign the box that appears below their name in box 2.

### Box 10: name and signature of witnesses.

Two or more witnesses must be present at the marriage; however, the statutory requirement is only two of the witnesses are required to sign the schedule. If desired, the couple may have up to four more witnesses (making a maximum of six) but the full name of the witnesses along with their signatures must remain legible within the space provided on the schedule. There is no age limit for a witness, but they must be able to understand what is taking place and if necessary, give evidence as to what they have seen and heard if they are required to testify in court.

As a matter of good practice, we recommend that you print the signatures of the parties to the marriage on the reverse of the marriage schedule. This will reduce the incidence of registration officers contacting you to clarify a signature prior to registration.

**Box 11**

This must be signed by the current appointed registering officer for the area meeting. Then write in your name and 'Registering Officer' as your designation.

If another Friend has signed box 8, because the registering officer was absent, then the RO is the person responsible for all the pre-marriage checks and making any necessary amendments to the schedule (getting the couple to initial them and adding the RO's own initials) to ensure that all the details recorded on the schedule are correct). If the RO is not present on the day, we strongly recommend that someone (such as the assistant RO) ensures that the couple is asked to make a final check of the details on the day before inviting them to sign. That person should also know the correct way to amend a schedule and ask the couple to initial the changes, just in case of last-minute alterations. The RO, having checked that all was in order, can then initial amendments made on the day, should there be any, and sign the schedule.

Once the schedule has been signed, we suggest that a copy (perhaps a photograph) is taken. This can be used to complete the online Quaker marriage return (see section 7), and also can be used if for any reason the local registration service has queries about the completed schedule. Once the online return has been completed, and the couple have received a civil marriage certificate, then this copy should be deleted or destroyed.

The schedule must be returned to the registration service so that the marriage can be registered.

After the marriage has been registered, copies of the marriage certificate can be obtained from the registrar on payment of the appropriate fee.

The Quaker registering officer no longer has a role in issuing copies of the civil marriage certificates.

**5.2.2 General guidance (Scotland)**

A Quaker marriage is conducted in Scotland under the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, which permits a religious or belief marriage to take place anywhere and to be solemnised by a person approved to do so under the act. A couple getting married in a Quaker meeting will be issued with a Marriage Schedule. One of the couple will have to collect it in person. The Marriage Schedule cannot be issued more than seven days before the marriage.

The Marriage Schedule must be produced before the marriage ceremony to the person performing the marriage. Changes to the marriage schedule should only be made with the authorisation of the registrar.

Immediately after the ceremony, the Schedule must be signed in black fountain pen by both of the couple, by the person performing the marriage and by the two witnesses. It must be returned to the registrar within three days so that the marriage can be registered.

After the marriage has been registered, copies of the marriage certificate can be obtained from the registrar on payment of the appropriate fee.



The Quaker registering officer has no role in issuing copies of the civil marriage certificates.

### 5.3 Form H – The certificate of accomplishment

#### *Quaker faith & practice* 16.63

Form H reports to area meetings both that the marriage has been solemnised and that it has been legally registered. In England and Wales, the Registering Officer is responsible for returning the schedule to the superintendent registrar, so they will know that this has been done. In Scotland, the couple are responsible for returning the signed copy of the marriage schedule to the district registrar who, on entering the details in the register of marriages, provides an extract of the entry (the marriage certificate) as a record for the couple. The couple should arrange for the registering officer to have sight of this as soon as possible after receipt. Only on receiving this, the registering officer is in a position to attest to the area meeting on Form H that legal registration has taken place.

There are two different versions of Form H. One is to be sent to the area meeting that is responsible for the marriage and the other to report to another area meeting that one of their members has had a Quaker marriage.

After every marriage, the first version of Form H will be required, this will be sent by the registering officer to the area meeting whose “proper officers” authorised the marriage. Note that even if it is the local meeting that granted authority for the marriage, it is the area meeting that records that it took place.

The area meetings that receive Form H should minute the accomplishment of the marriage in the minutes of the area meeting, giving the names of the couple, their membership status, and the date and place of the marriage. Where a local meeting has appointed the meeting for worship to solemnise the marriage, then Form H will be the first time that the area meeting officially knows of the marriage.

#### *Sample area meeting minute:*

*[Following our agreement in minute {date and number of minute}\* we have received from our registering officer a certificate of accomplishment of the marriage between [name 1], (a member of [name of AM] area meeting/not in membership\*\*) and [name 2], (a member of [name of AM] area meeting/not in membership\*\*) which took place at [place] on date of marriage].*

\* only when the area meeting appointed the meeting for worship.

\*\* delete as appropriate

A copy of this minute should be sent to the registering officer, this will ensure that the marriages reported by the annual return have all been properly recorded by the area meeting.

Where someone getting married is a member of a different area meeting, then the registering officer sends the second version of Form H to the area meeting where membership is held, if that is different from where the marriage took place. It is possible

where a couple are each members of a different area meeting and get married in a third place, for a total of three Forms H to be needed.

This will be the first time that the other area meeting will officially know of the marriage of one of their members, even though some members of that area meeting may have attended the wedding.

*Sample area meeting minute for a member of the area meeting who was married in a different area meeting:*

*We have received from, [name], the registering officer for [name of AM] a certificate of accomplishment of the marriage between [name 1], (a member of [name of AM] area meeting/not in membership\*\*) and [name 2], (a member of [name of AM] area meeting/not in membership\*\*) which took place at [place] on date of marriage].*

\*\* delete as appropriate

See Section 7: Returns for more on what needs to be done in terms of reporting to BYM



## 6. Appointment and role of registering officers

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.22–24

### 6.1 Appointment of a registering officer

The name of a new registering officer must be notified to Yearly Meeting staff by the area meeting clerk. For area meetings in Scotland, Yearly Meeting staff will inform the General Meeting for Scotland who in turn notifies the Scottish authorities. For area meetings in England and Wales, Yearly Meeting staff notify the General Register Office, who will send a confirmation to the registering officer. If a registering officer changes their name, address, telephone number or email address, then they should inform Yearly Meeting staff without delay.

The law governing England and Wales is set out in the Marriage Act 1949. There are numerous references to the Society in the Act, in particular the points where Quaker (as well as Jewish) weddings differ from all others. All marriages other than those according to the usage of the Church of England, the Society of Friends and the Jews require the presence of an “authorised person”, certified by a superintendent registrar in relation to a specific “registered building”. The Society’s registering officers are not “authorised persons” though many of their responsibilities are very similar. Nor do Quaker marriages have to take place in registered buildings, although Friends’ meeting houses may be registered buildings for worship with the local authority. It has been customary for marriages to take place in Quaker meeting houses. See section 11 for the place of a meeting for worship for the solemnisation of a marriage.

Section 43 of the Marriage Act 1949 deals with the appointment of “authorised persons” for the enabling of marriages to be solemnised in a registered building, being persons certified by the trustees or governing body of a registered building. Section 43 (3) indicates that this does not have any reference to Quaker marriages so it is not surprising that, on occasion, superintendent registrars send forms to registering officers which are intended only for use by authorised persons (see section 8 for legal responsibilities)

A superintendent registrar may not have much experience of Quaker marriages and it is well for the registering officer to establish friendly contact with their own registration officers (that is, the superintendent registrar for the district in which the registering officer lives) whom the registering officer will be able to consult on civil matters. It is usual for an area meeting to cover the districts of several superintendent registrars.

Each area meeting will appoint a registering officer to be responsible for Quaker marriages within their area meeting. If an area meeting wishes to appoint more than one registering officer, then the Recording Clerk should be consulted in advance of any appointment. Area meetings should normally only appoint one registering officer.

The new registering officer will be asked if their email address can be added to a list to

receive updates and further information.

Registering officer appointments tend not to follow same practice on restricting the number of triennia the registering officers may serve as for other Quaker roles, for the reason that weddings do not take place at regular intervals – it is not unknown for an area meeting to have no weddings for years and then two or three in the same year! However, registering officers should themselves be aware that it is good practice for roles to be shared across the Quaker community, and to be ready in good time to train up a future registering officer, before they themselves relinquish the role.

It is possible for two (or more) neighbouring area meetings to appoint the same person as registering officer, as long as each area meeting and the registering officer are content that the workload will not too onerous, and that the registering officer will be able to give full support to all couples, taking into account both time and geography – how far will they need to travel to meet with couples or to attend marriages? In these cases, the registering officer will have to take care to report each marriage to the correct area meeting. Effectively, as far as the Yearly Meeting and reporting marriages are concerned, the registering officer holds different posts for each area meeting.

## 6.2 Death or incapacity of registering officer

In the event of the sudden death or incapacity of a registering officer, the Recording Clerk must be consulted immediately. It may be necessary to hold a special area meeting to appoint a new registering officer. A deputy or assistant registering officer, who will have had some training, may be formally appointed in this eventuality, which is another advantage in appointing a deputy or assistant. A temporary appointment of the registering officer from a neighbouring area meeting may be possible.

It is important that a vacancy for a registering officer lasts for as short a time as possible. It is not possible for a Quaker marriage to take place if an area meeting does not have a registering officer in place.

Yearly Meeting staff should be informed without delay in these circumstances.

## 6.3 Appointment of assistant or deputy registering officer

Many area meetings also appoint a deputy or assistant registering officer, to aid the registering officer in his or her duties. However, in England and Wales, an assistant or deputy registering officer may not sign box 11 of the marriage schedule; only formally appointed registering officers may do so. In Scotland it is possible for area meetings to appoint deputy registering officers, whose names should be notified to the Registrar General for Scotland, after which they may act as registering officers, including signing the marriage schedule.

## 6.4 Role of the registering officer

The registering officer's primary role is to ensure, on behalf of the Society, that proper procedures are followed. A couple wanting to marry 'in a Quaker meeting house' or 'as part of a Quaker meeting for worship' or for many other reasons depending on their experience of the Society of Friends will eventually be directed to the registering officer for the area in which they live or where their chosen meeting house is located.

The registering officer takes the couple through the whole of the "adequate preliminaries", including the legal requirements. Only the formally appointed registering officer can sign the marriage schedules (except in Scotland where a deputy or assistant registering officer can do so.)

The registering officer has an interesting role, as apart from the privilege of coordinating the arrangements for the Quaker wedding and registering the marriage they will also be involved with outreach and pastoral care. This arises from:

- early contact with the couple at a particularly tender stage in their relationship and a key role in their preparation for marriage, including any meeting for clearness
- helping to ensure that the wedding day runs as smoothly as possible (deriving from the registering officer's experience of such occasions)
- a long-lasting interest in the couple married under the care of the meeting.

Registering officers will frequently be consulted by elders or pastoral care Friends or area meetings on matters to do with relationships and marriage and will themselves be involved with sensitive matters such as meetings for clearness when these are held (see section 12: meetings for clearness).

Reference to some of these matters is made in other sections. Most registering officers are not in a position to involve themselves with all of them, for all couples; rather, the registering officer may be the member of the meeting best placed to check that matters are brought before local elders or pastoral care Friends at appropriate times.

### 6.4.1 Absence of the registering officer

If the registering officer is prevented from being present at a wedding, they or the area meeting clerk may appoint a suitable Friend to act on their behalf at the wedding itself. See section 5.2.1 for the action to be taken in England and Wales. In England and Wales, care must be taken that the marriage schedule is duly completed and signed immediately following the marriage by the wedded couple and their witnesses. The Friend taking place of the registering officer on this occasion can sign the schedule in Box 8, but only the appointed registering officer can sign box 11. This needs to be done as soon afterwards as possible when the registering officer has been satisfied that the proper proceedings were followed.

It is essential that the preliminaries are dealt with by the registering officer. If for any personal reason this is not feasible it may be possible to ask a registering officer of a neighbouring area meeting to manage the procedures in consultation with the area meeting clerk. Please consult Yearly Meeting staff.

### 6.4.2 Other tasks that may be required of the registering officer

**Passports:** If one of a couple is intending to change their name on marriage, they can apply for a passport in the new name before the marriage has taken place. In this case, they are required (by the Passport Office) to provide the name of a Minister of Religion or superintendent registrar who will be conducting the marriage. For this purpose, the Quaker Registering Officer is a minister of religion, and can sign the relevant form, putting the words “Registering Officer for the Society of Friends (Quakers)” beneath their signature.

**Apostille or Legalisation service:** The Foreign & Commonwealth Office may sometimes contact a registering officer to check that a signature on a marriage certificate issued by the Society of Friends is genuine. Their email is likely to explain that

“Legalisation is the process whereby we issue and attach an Apostille to a UK document in accordance with the Hague Convention of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1961. The Apostille confirms that the signature, stamp or seal on the document is true and genuine.

We keep an extensive database of signatures of thousands of solicitors, notaries public, doctors, registrars and government officials from which to verify signatures as being authentic. Unfortunately our database does not currently hold a sample of the signature on the document.

I have attached a copy of the document and would be grateful if you could confirm the following information:

- The full name of the person whose signature this is
- This is their genuine and personal signature
- The capacity in which they have signed (e.g. registrar, etc)

Once confirmed we will store a sample of the signature on the Legalisation database for comparison purposes. Please be assured that the database is accessible only to Legalisation Office staff.”

Sometimes the enquiry comes to BYM staff, rather than the current registering officer. In this case we will contact the current registering officer, asking them to look back at records and old marriage registers to help confirm that the particular marriage certificate is genuine.

Please feel welcome to contact BYM staff if you receive such a request. These requests will only refer to marriage certificates that would have been signed by a Quaker registering officer.

## 6.5 Civil responsibilities

This section summarises the civil responsibilities that Quakers have for marriages.

### Scotland

General Meeting for Scotland (on behalf of the YM) advises the Registrar General (for Scotland) of the appointment or change of a registering officer or deputy/assistant.

The registering officer (or deputy/assistant) receives the civil Marriage Schedule from the couple, which authorises the marriage to take place.

The registering officer (or deputy/assistant) signs the civil Marriage Schedule once the wedding has taken place.

The registering officer makes sure that the couple know they have to return the Marriage Schedule to the District Registrar, who issues a marriage certificate.

### England and Wales

The Recording Clerk (on behalf of the YM) advises the Registrar General (for England and Wales) of the appointment or change of a registering officer. (Note that any deputy or assistant has no status in the eyes of the local registration service.)

The registering officer issues a form to non-members for them to give to the superintendent registrar authorising them to have a Quaker marriage.

The registering officer receives the schedule that allows a marriage to take place.

The registering officer signs the civil Marriage Schedule once the wedding has taken place.

The registering officer is responsible for returning the Marriage Schedule to the Superintendent Registrar, who issues a marriage certificate.

## 7. Returns

### 7.1 Reporting marriages

All marriages which take place under Quaker auspices in Britain Yearly Meeting need to be reported to Yearly Meeting staff.

Civil partnership conversions should be included where the conversion happened under Quaker auspices:

- The civil authorities in Scotland issued a marriage schedule and the conversion happened in an appointed Quaker meeting for worship.
- A Civil Registrar in England or Wales came to the meeting house and undertook the administrative task before an appointed Quaker meeting for worship.
- A couple had their civil partnership converted into a marriage by the local registration service in a registry office and then held an appointed meeting for worship.

Each of these options would have required a set of Quaker marriage forms to be completed and for the area meeting to have authorised the wedding to take place.

Historically, these reports were referred to as marriage extracts, as they consisted of information that was extracted from the marriage registers in England and Wales, and the marriage schedule in Scotland.

Since 2021, this reporting is done through two online forms.

- 1) **Individual marriage report:** This can be done as soon as the marriage has taken place. You will need the information that the couple supplied on Form A, and a copy of the final marriage schedule for this. If information on Form A has changed, e.g. a change of profession, or the death of a parent, then use the information as at the date of the wedding. You are advised to take a copy of the final signed schedule, before sending it to the Superintendent Registrar, both as an insurance if the schedule should get lost in the post, and for this reporting to BYM.
- 2) **End of year return:** You should report the total number of marriages which have taken place in the year, which should be done in January of the following year. This information goes into the tabular statement produced each year in time for Yearly Meeting.

The links to these two forms are included in the welcome letter sent to registering officers, and also shared periodically on the email list. As this is a public document, we have chosen not to share the links here.

Providing this information to the Yearly Meeting is an important part of your role as registering officer.

## 7.2 Retention of Quaker paperwork

The associated Quaker paperwork for the marriages (such as the completed forms) should be kept for five full years. Registering officers will save themselves and their successors a great deal of time by putting all the paperwork in an envelope, sealing it, and labelling with the names of

- Marriages in 2021, destroy the paperwork in January 2027
- Marriages in 2022, destroy the paperwork in January 2028
- Marriages in 2023, destroy the paperwork in January 2029
- Marriages in 2024, destroy the paperwork in January 2030
- Marriages in 2025, destroy the paperwork in January 2031
- Marriages in 2026, destroy the paperwork in January 2032
- Marriages in 2027, destroy the paperwork in January 2033

Registering officers may wish to make sure they keep all notes of their meetings with a couple with this paperwork, if there is any possibility of there being complications in relation to immigration. It has been known for an immigration agency to query the validity of a marriage after it has taken place, and any documents that a registering officer can give might be helpful to the couple.

Copies of the marriage schedule should be destroyed as soon as you have completed form H, the online individual marriage report and had confirmation that the couple have received a marriage certificate.

## 7.3 Certified copies of a marriage certificate

Occasionally, those who have been married in the area meeting may require a certified copy of an entry in the legal marriage register. This is generally referred to as a marriage certificate.

In England and Wales, the registering officer used to be able to issue these. This is no longer the case, not even for marriages that took place before May 2021.

Any couple requiring an official copy of their civil marriage certificate, needs to contact either the appropriate registration office, or order a certificate online from the General Register Office for marriages that took place in England or Wales, or National Records Scotland for marriages that took place in Scotland.



## 8. Legal framework

### 8.1 Summary of procedure: England and Wales

The law governing marriage in England and Wales has been laid down by a series of statutes. The first Marriage Act of 1753, which regulated the legal and civic recognition of marriage, stipulated that the one single way to be married was before a minister of the Church of England but exceptionally just Jews and Quakers, who had well developed codes of good practice already in place, were allowed to ‘do their own thing’. Thus, Quakers’ marriages were legally recognised at a time when marriages within other nonconformist traditions were not legally recognised.

This special exemption for Quakers has continued in subsequent Marriage Acts in England and Wales up to and including the Marriage Act 1949, section 47, which allows “marriage according to the usages of the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers”. However, in the meantime there has been dialogue between Friends and the wider society around us, resulting in changes in the law and in the practices of our Society. In regard to the latter, one of which is that Britain Yearly Meeting has established procedures which must be followed exactly in a Quaker setting if the outcome is to be regarded as a full marriage: some procedures similar to those current in the wider society; other procedures which are to be regarded as essential as standard usages in our own Society. The role of a registering officer is to ensure that both procedures are actually followed in every detail.

The law governing marriage in England and Wales is set out in the Marriage Act 1949. There are numerous references to the Society in the Act setting out, in particular, the points where Quaker (as well as Jewish) weddings differ from all others. All marriages other than those according to the usage of the Church of England, the Society of Friends and the Jews, require the presence of a registrar or of an “authorised person” certified by a superintendent registrar in relation to a specified “registered building”. The Society’s registering officers are not “authorised persons”, though very many of their responsibilities are similar. Nor do Quaker marriages have to take place in registered buildings. Since May 2021, with the introduction of marriage schedules in England and Wales, Quaker registering officers are part of the category of people who are known as a “specified person” in the Marriage Act 1949, as revised. This relates to who can sign the marriage schedule to confirm that the marriage has taken place according to law and the rules and regulations of Friends.

In England and Wales, same-sex marriages have taken place since 29 March 2014. For those marriages, the procedures used are the same as those used for opposite-sex couples.

In England and Wales, the marriage will normally take place in a meeting house of the Society. However, marriages can take place in any place agreed by the area meeting which appoints the meeting for worship (see section 11: Time and place). When a venue other than a Quaker meeting house is proposed, the registering officer should be able to assure Friends that a suggested location is appropriate for the right holding of a Quaker



wedding.

Quaker marriages have two marriage certificates: the first to align Quaker practice with standard practice in the wider society, to meet the expectations of the law, the second to maintain a unique, distinctive and solely Quaker tradition:

- Civil marriage certificate – this is the certificate recognised by the government, and also recognised by other institutions such as banks, etc. This is issued by the local registration service, once the marriage schedule has been returned.
- Quaker marriage certificate – this is a large document which sets out the couple's names, the procedure they have followed and the declarations made. It is signed by the couple themselves, and by *all* who were present for the declarations at the meeting for worship for solemnisation of their marriage. This is a requirement of Britain Yearly Meeting (and indeed of many yearly meetings) and is kept by the couple themselves; however, in the UK, it is not normally recognised as a valid proof of the marriage by any organisation outside of the Religious Society of Friends.

The position of Quaker registering officer is rare, so a superintendent registrar might not be familiar with it. It approximates to the much more common 'Authorised Person' and superintendent registrars quite often confuse the two and communicate with them as one. If this happens, a registering officer needing advice on how to proceed can consult Yearly Meeting staff (see section 21 Contacts)

In England and Wales, the registering officer acts on behalf of the local registration service in confirming that a non-member may have a Quaker marriage.

The administrative requirements of both the local registration service and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) must be satisfied. The registering officer is responsible to the area meeting as a whole (not solely the trustees), which appointed them, but the support of the area meeting should be expressed through contact with local elders and pastoral care Friends, or through consultation with an *ad hoc* group of Friends specially appointed by the area meeting. A registering officer may find it helpful at times to consult with another registering officer or former registering officer, perhaps one who has had long experience. Registering officers can also access the experience of other registering officers through the email list set up by Yearly Meeting staff. On matters of interpretation a registering officer should consult the Recording Clerk (see section 21: Contacts and resources).

Section 47 of the Marriage Act 1949 stipulates *inter alia* that marriages according to the usage of the Society of Friends are valid only if they are conducted "in pursuance of a general rule of the said Society in England", and in the event of any question as to the validity of a Quaker marriage it is for the Society's Recording Clerk to indicate what is the "general rule" of the Society.

### 8.1.1 Civil partnership conversions

*Quaker faith & practice* 6.16

Same-sex couples who are civil partners and wish to convert this to a marriage in a Quaker meeting for worship may do so, where this is permitted by law. Yearly Meeting staff must be consulted at the earliest point where this is requested. Processes have been developed for the conversion of a civil partnership into a marriage under the auspices of a Quaker meeting, which permit some leeway. These can be obtained from Yearly Meeting staff on request.

A conversion of a civil partnership into a marriage under Quaker auspices in England and Wales has been allowed for under section 12(1)(c) of the Marriage of Same Sex Couples (Conversion of Civil Partnership) Regulations 2014, provided that a Quaker marriage ceremony is held immediately following the conversion. This does not require a meeting house to be registered for marriages.

Such a conversion would need to be followed by a Quaker marriage using Section 46 of the Marriage Act 1949. We had hitherto not used this section, but this is the way that has been found to enable a conversion to take place on religious premises. Section 46 permits a religious ceremony to take place immediately after a civil marriage service.

One reason for needing to use a different part of the 1949 Act is that Marriage Registers had to be kept chronologically. A civil partnership will be converted into a marriage from the date of the civil partnership.

Such a conversion will be open to any couple in a civil partnership, where one or both of them are associated with or a member of the Society. It is not necessary for either to have been associated with Friends at the time of their civil partnership. This means that we cannot compile a list of couples who might wish to convert a civil partnership into a marriage at a Quaker meeting place.

Civil partnerships can only be converted into a marriage in England and Wales, if the original civil partnership was registered in England and Wales.

Finance. Traditionally, Friends have not charged couples fees for getting married. A fee will be payable for a civil registrar to attend a meeting house. It may be appropriate for the meeting to pay (or offer to reimburse the couple) the fee they are charged.

## 8.2 Summary of procedure: Scotland

In Scotland the basis of registration is different, being defined by the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977. The district registrar enters all details in the register of marriages, transcribing them from the marriage schedule which has been signed by the couple, two witnesses and the “approved celebrant” immediately after the solemnisation of the marriage. The district registrar in this case is the registrar within whose district the marriage has been solemnised. The Society of Friends is not specifically named in the Act. Instead, its right to solemnise marriages comes under sections 8 and 9 of the Act, which states that a religious body may nominate to the Registrar General any of its

members who it desires should be registered to solemnise marriages, as long as they are over 21 years of age. Furthermore, the marriage ceremony used by the religious body must be of an appropriate form, containing declarations by the couple with approved wording and before witnesses, and a declaration by the celebrant that the couple are now married. The Registrar General for Scotland is notified by the Clerk of General Meeting for Scotland of the names and addresses of those appointed as registering officers in Scotland.

In Scotland the district registrar issues a marriage schedule which specifies the date and place at which the marriage is to be solemnised; if for any reason these have to be changed, the district registrar must be contacted in order to issue a new marriage schedule or to authorise a substitution. While the wedding must be held within the district registrar's district, it is up to the appointing meeting (generally the area meeting) to specify the place. It is desirable to hold weddings in meeting houses or other places where meetings for worship are held regularly; however, such places are frequently too small or too distant from couples' homes. Registering officers should be able to assure Friends that a suggested location is appropriate for the right holding of a Quaker wedding.

In Scotland same-sex marriages have been possible since 31 December 2014, the Society of Friends is listed as able to hold same-sex marriages in the Same Sex Marriage (Prescribed Bodies) (Scotland) Regulations 2014. For those marriages, the procedures to be used are the same as those used for opposite-sex couples in Scotland.

### **8.2.1 Civil partnership conversions**

#### *Quaker faith & practice 6.16*

Same-sex couples who are civil partners and wish to convert this to a marriage in a Quaker meeting for worship may do so, where this is permitted by law. Yearly Meeting staff must be consulted at the earliest point where this is requested. Processes have been developed for the conversion of a civil partnership into a marriage under the auspices of a Quaker meeting, which permit some leeway. These can be obtained from Yearly Meeting staff on request.

A conversion of a civil partnership into a marriage is possible in Scotland within a Quaker marriage ceremony.

Such a conversion will be open to any couple in a civil partnership, where one or both of them are associated with or a member of the Society. It is not necessary for either to have been associated with Friends at the time of their civil partnership. This means that we cannot compile a list of couples who might wish to convert a civil partnership in a marriage in a Quaker meeting.

Civil partnerships can be converted into a marriage in Scotland, regardless of where the civil partnership took place, however, if the civil partnership took place outwith Scotland, then there may be legal questions around its status in other jurisdictions.

Finance. Traditionally, Friends have not charged couples fees for getting married. It may

be appropriate for the meeting to pay (or offer to reimburse the couple) the fees they are charged.

### 8.3 Isle of Man

There is marriage equality on the Isle of Man.

The Recording Clerk and Isle of Man General Registry should be consulted in all cases where a Quaker marriage is planned.

Under Isle of Man law the requirements are as follows:

1. A meeting house may be registered for marriages.
2. The proprietor or trustees of a building which has been used for meeting for worship for twelve months previously may register that building for Quaker marriages. A fee may be payable.
3. The Registrar, Isle of Man, thought that the authority of the registering officer of the area meeting (as to whether the individuals concerned may appropriately be married according to Friends' usage) could be accepted, even though the registering officer is unlikely to be an Isle of Man resident. Should a marriage be requested, then this will need to be checked.
4. The usual regulations apply about informing the registrar well in advance of the proposed wedding.

### 8.4 Channel Islands

For any intended marriage in the Channel Islands, Yearly Meeting staff must be consulted at the earliest point in the process.

For a meeting for worship for the solemnisation of a marriage in Jersey meeting house, an application for a certificate for marriage may be made in writing to the superintendent registrar but the certificate must be collected in person.

Although there is a meeting house on Guernsey, there are no provisions for meetings for worship for the solemnisation of a marriage to be held there. A civil ceremony is required.

Marriage laws are evolving on each of the Channel Islands. Where same-sex marriages cannot take place, but a civil partnership is possible, then a Quaker marriage could be held in conjunction with a civil partnership, just as they could in England, Scotland and Wales between 2009 and 2014. (See section 9.)

## 8.5 Northern Ireland

Quaker meetings in Northern Ireland are part of Ireland Yearly Meeting and so marriages that take place in Northern Ireland will follow that yearly meeting's processes

## 9 Recent marriage law history

### 9.1 Quaker same-sex marriages 2009–2014

This section is included to provide some history about same-sex Quaker marriages within Britain Yearly Meeting.

Civil partnerships became possible in 2005 throughout the United Kingdom for same-sex couples. Ceremonies held to create a civil partnership, as the name suggests, were similar in format to civil marriages and could have no religious character.

When civil partnerships were introduced, places that were registered for civil marriages were not automatically registered for civil partnerships, and so a separate registration process was required. A religious venue could not be registered as a place where a civil partnership could take place.

Many Quaker couples had civil partnerships and some may also have had a Quaker ceremony (or celebration) of commitment, equivalent to a Quaker marriage, but not recorded as such in any way.

Yearly Meeting 2009 agreed to treat same-sex committed relationships in the same way as opposite-sex couples (16.08 part). This resulted in some complex Quaker regulations which had the effect of allowing a same-sex couple to have a Quaker marriage provided that was associated with a civil partnership. This gave various possibilities. A couple already in a civil partnership could go through the normal Quaker marriage process, completing the Quaker forms and having a Quaker meeting for worship and a Quaker marriage certificate, but the registering officer did not report the marriage to the local registration service. The civil partnership could happen on the same day as the Quaker marriage. All of these should have been recorded as marriages by the area meeting and included in the annual returns to Yearly Meeting.

In December 2011, prompted by the Equality Act 2010, a statutory instrument known as the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 came into effect in England and Wales. This enabled religious buildings to register as places where civil partnerships could take place. Some Quaker meetings registered their meeting houses under these regulations. This gave an additional option in England and Wales where a same-sex couple could have a Quaker wedding in a Quaker meeting house and it could be followed immediately by a civil partnership ceremony in the same building.

However, such registration incurred a fee, which differed wildly from local authority to local authority; many meetings felt that the cost was too much.

In 2013 and 2014, laws were passed that enabled same-sex marriages to take place. Same-sex marriages were possible in England and Wales from 29 March 2014 and in Scotland from 31 December 2014. Conversions from civil partnerships were possible in England and Wales from 10 December 2014 and in Scotland from 16 December 2014. When the ability to convert was initially introduced, only civil partnerships registered in Scotland could be converted into a marriage in Scotland and equally a civil partnership in

England or Wales can only be converted into a marriage in England or Wales. This had the effect of making it impossible to convert a civil partnership contracted in Northern Ireland into a marriage. Quaker same-sex marriages take place under the same regulations as Quaker opposite-sex marriages, so we can hold a marriage where we wish.

The original conversion proposals in England and Wales would have resulted in a purely administrative process. As a result of pressure from us and other interested groups, this was changed so that a civil partnership conversion could be undertaken wherever a religious same-sex marriage can take place, including in a Quaker meeting house, with a local authority registrar coming and recording the change. (See section 8.1.1 for more details).

In Scotland it is now possible to convert a civil partnership into a marriage regardless of the place or the original civil partnership (or equivalent in other jurisdictions). (See section 8.2.1 for more details). It is not yet known how a conversion in Scotland of a civil partnership contracted in England or Wales will be regarded by official bodies in England and Wales.

We were clear that an objection based on theological grounds (that a marriage had to be between one man and one woman) would not be a valid objection to a marriage, as our Yearly Meeting has agreed to marry couples irrespective of the gender of those wishing to marry, provided that they are connected to the Quaker community.

## 9.2 Quaker same-sex marriages before 2009

Before Yearly Meeting 2009 clearly recorded our understanding of marriage equality, some meetings had agreed to hold a celebration of commitment for same-sex couples. This had no legal significance, but was seen by many as equivalent to a Quaker marriage, but not recorded as such in any way.

Registering officers at that time were advised to be very careful in their involvement in any such meetings for worship so that it was clear that we did not officially regard such a meeting for worship as a marriage.

Couples who had such a meeting later had various legal options.

A Between 2009 and 2014 these were

- 1 A civil partnership with no Quaker involvement
- 2 A civil partnership with an associated Quaker wedding \*

B After 2014

- 3 A Quaker wedding (not having had a civil partnership) \*
- 4 A Quaker wedding associated with a civil partnership conversion \*
- 5 A civil partnership conversion into a marriage with no Quaker involvement
- 6 A marriage with no Quaker involvement.

\* These three options require the appropriate Quaker marriage processes and procedures to be followed.



### 9.3 Marriage registers and marriage certificates

In England and Wales from 1837 until May 2021, Quaker registering officers held the legal marriage registers and had to register Quaker marriages “as soon as conveniently may be after the solemnisation of the marriage” in duplicate in two marriage register books and the law required the registering officer “whether or not he was present at the marriage [to] satisfy himself that the proceedings in relation to the marriage were conformable to the usage of the said Society”.

All registering officers in England and Wales had in their safekeeping two copies of the registers (the books in which marriages were legally recorded) and a book of blank civil certificates for issuing copies of marriage register entries.

Each quarter, the registering officers had to report the numbers and details of all the marriages that had taken place under Quaker auspices.

These registers and quarterly reports, which had to be completed in longhand in registration ink, were a source of anxiety to registering officers. It was not only registering officers that had to keep these registers, but also Churches and synagogues.

When a marriage register book was complete (or closed), one copy of the closed registers was returned to the General Register Office via the Registering Officer’s local registry office, and the other copy stored in the archive of the Area Meeting. Where this archive is varies across the country and may be a local library or archive, or Friends House library. The copies held in our Area Meeting archives should be kept safely: they form part of the permanent records of the Society of Friends.

On 4 May 2021 all marriage registers were closed and one copy of the registers was returned to the local registration service. At the same time the system of marriage schedules was introduced. The registration of marriages is now carried out by registration service staff.

Couples used to be able to obtain copies of their civil marriage certificate from the registering officer. This is no longer possible, not even for marriages that took place before the marriage registers were closed. This is because it is possible for errors in a register to be officially corrected. While the registers were open, this could involve the registering officer making changes to the marriage register on the authority of the GRO. Now the registers are closed, the changes will only be made in the documents held by the registration service. Thus, we cannot be absolutely certain that the information held in our copies of the marriage registers has not been officially changed.

The May 2021 changes have greatly simplified the civil responsibilities of our registering officers, and removed some of the duties that provided most challenges on the day of the wedding.

### 9.4 Two religious weddings on the same day

It used to be possible for a couple to have two legal marriages on the same day, for example at two different churches. This is no longer the case.

## 10. The role of the registration service

### 10.1 England and Wales

#### *Quaker faith & practice* 16.33

In England and Wales the registration of marriages is the responsibility of the local registration service. The official who is head of the local registration service is called the superintendent registrar.

Section 26 (1)(c) of the Marriage Act 1949 provides that “a marriage according to the usages of the Society of Friends (commonly called Quakers) may be solemnised on the authority of a marriage schedule.

Each person wishing to be married must give 28 clear days’ notice in person to the superintendent registrar of the district in which they live. Each notice of the marriage is displayed for 28 clear days, after which a schedule will be issued by the superintendent registrar, which states that the law has been duly complied with.

The couple should check what arrangements are made for the schedule to be issued when they give notice. This is particularly important if the marriage is to take place in a district other than where notice is being given.

The superintendent registrar of the area(s) where the couple live may have had no previous experience of Quaker marriages at all, though they will have readily available a handbook to consult. They may raise questions when they find that the place where the marriage is to be held is not in the list of registered buildings, and it is as well for the applicants to know that places where Quaker marriages can be held do not have to be registered for this purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The schedule is valid for 12 months from the date of issue. It is essential that the registering officer has the schedule in their possession in order for the meeting for worship for the marriage to take place. It is advisable to hold a meeting with the couple a short time before that date and for the registering officer ensure they have possession of the schedule and to examine the Quaker marriage certificate to ensure the wording

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing the GRO Handbook for Registration Officers says:

*Section: M4.2*

*There is no restriction as to place of marriage when it is solemnised according to the usages of the Jews or the Society of Friends. A marriage according to the usages of the Society of Friends will normally take place in a meeting house or other place at which their meetings for worship are regularly held.*

*and M4.40*

*Quakers’ meeting houses (Society of Friends)*

*Where a marriage is to be solemnised according to the usages of the Society of Friends the marriage will normally take place in a meeting house of the Society in England or Wales, or other place at which their meetings for worship are regularly held, whether within or outside the district(s) of residence of the parties.*

inscribed there is correct. See also section 20: Checklist of procedures for registering officers.

Couples should be reassured that any prescriptive wording on the back of a marriage schedule, which dictate how a marriage should be carried out, do not apply to Quaker marriages.

The registering officer should advise the applicants to confirm the information they are required to give to the superintendent registrar (this will be on the local authority's website). The couple will need to make an appointment and confirmation of the required documentation will also be given then. They should take their passports (if they have one) or birth certificates (if born before 1983; if either person was born in or after 1983, they will need both their own full birth certificate and their mother's birth certificate) and if previously married, either the death certificate of a deceased spouse or evidence of divorce. They will also need to produce proof of address. Original documents are required. Where either of the couple comes from outside the UK, they must take their passport or other official travel or identity document. A fee is payable for each notice given (currently £35.00). If the couple reside in different districts, separate notice must be given to the superintendent registrar of each district. If one of the couple lives in Scotland, there is provision for that person to give notice in Scotland while the other one gives notice in the district of England or Wales in which they live. Non-members must each take Form D (see section 2.4 for more on the use of Form D).

The superintendent registrar will interview each person separately and ask personal questions about the other to ascertain their familiarity with each and so remove the possibility of a sham or forced marriage.

In view of the small number of marriages taking place under Quaker auspices each year, it is likely that many superintendent registrars may not understand the special status of Quaker marriages in relation to the law and especially that a Form D is not needed for members of the Society of Friends. It is advisable therefore, for registering officers to send a letter to the superintendent registrar(s) in advance of the couple's meetings with them, or to have a phone conversation with them, to outline Quaker procedure. A template letter is given in Appendix A of this section.

Quakers in Britain have made it clear to the General Register Office that we are pleased to marry same-sex couples. Just in case a superintendent registrar needs reassurance of this, there is a letter on the BYM website confirming this decision. It is one page long and can be printed out and taken when notice of a marriage is given. The text of the letter is included in Appendix B of this section.

The superintendent registrar's schedule is the authority for the marriage to take place. It may be sent directly to the registering officer or the couple may be asked to collect it.

If the date by which the marriage must be held, which is printed on the schedule has been passed, then new notice will be required and the marriage cannot take place. In such circumstances, any schedule which may have been issued is no longer valid and the couple will need to give notice again.

It is essential that the registering officer has in their possession the schedule, in order for the meeting for worship for the marriage to take place. The registering officer will need the

for the annual returns (see section 7: Returns).

## 10.2 Scotland

### *Quaker faith & practice* 16.33

In Scotland the registration of marriages is the responsibility of the local registration service. The official who is head of the local registration service is called the district registrar.

Registering officers should ensure that couples are clear about the procedures that they must follow with regard to the preliminaries to the registration of their marriage. They must make applications to the district registrar within whose district the wedding will be held, using marriage notices obtained from the registrar's office. The notices are accompanied by the fee, birth certificates and any evidence relating to a previous marriage, and these should be submitted more than three weeks, but not more than three months, before the intended wedding date. If there are any unusual circumstances, such as one of the couple being a citizen of a country other than the United Kingdom, the district registrar should be consulted well in advance of the submission of the marriage notices.

The district registrar will generally want to know the names and addresses of the two witnesses who are to sign the marriage schedule. If asked who the "approved celebrant" is to be, the answer is that the "registering officer of the Religious Society of Friends" will be present (this phrase is used both on the marriage schedule and in the entry in the register of marriages).

The schedule cannot be issued more than seven days before the proposed date of the marriage, and it is valid for three months from the date of issue. It is essential that the registering officer has the schedule in their possession in order for the meeting for worship for the marriage to take place. It is advisable to hold a meeting with the couple a short time before that date and for the registering officer ensure they have possession of the schedule and to examine the Quaker marriage certificate to ensure the wording inscribed there is correct. See also section 20: Checklist of procedures for registering officers.

## 10.3 Wording on forms and civil certificates

The schedule will record the given names and surname of each of the couple in the form which they used and by which they were generally known when notice of marriage was given to the registrar. The names used should appear in the same form on the Society's Form A, the marriage schedule and the first part of the Quaker marriage certificate. In Scotland, the schedule will also include maiden names where appropriate. If the schedule has a note by a surname words as "name changed by deed poll" or "formerly known as Smith", such words need not appear in the Quaker marriage certificate.

## Appendix A

To the superintendent registrar

Dear

This letter is to confirm that <.....> is a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

When a non-member wishes to marry according to the usage of the Religious Society of Friends in England and Wales, the Quaker registering officer has to provide a certificate that can be passed to the superintendent registrar when notice is given, as required by the Marriage Act 1949 s.47(2)(b).

No such certificate may be issued when a member of the Religious Society of Friends wishes to marry according to our usage.

Please contact me if you have any queries.

Yours, in Friendship,

Name

Registering officer of <.....> Area Meeting.

## Appendix B

To superintendent registrars

July 2015

Dear Friends

### **Quaker same-sex weddings**

This letter is to confirm that the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) consents to same-sex marriages and the conversion of civil partnerships to marriage (wherever legally possible) throughout Great Britain.

General permission is given for same-sex marriages to be registered by all of our registering officers in England and Wales.

We are pleased that the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is a prescribed body under the Same Sex Marriage (Prescribed Bodies) (Scotland) Regulations 2014.

This information can also be found at [www.quaker.org.uk/ro](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ro) on the Quakers in Britain website. In case of any queries on this matter, please contact my colleague Michael Booth ([michaelsb@quaker.org.uk](mailto:michaelsb@quaker.org.uk) / 020 7663 1023) or myself.

In Friendship,

Paul Parker

Recording Clerk

## 11. Time and place of the meeting for worship

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.46

The meeting for worship for marriage must be fully public and well attended by members of the Society, and it is up to the area meeting to ensure that this will be the case before the meeting is appointed.

When it comes to the time and place of the meeting for worship, we reflect current marriage procedures and regulations as set out in law. Where marriage law differentiates between civil and religious marriages, we look to the least restrictive regulations for guidance.

In Scotland, a marriage may be solemnised in any place, including outdoors.

In England and Wales, for many years, Quaker practice was that meeting for worship for marriage could only take place in a meeting house or other places where regular meetings for worship were held, and within the times prescribed by the Marriage Act 1949, that is, 08:00–18:00. However, the time restriction for marriages has been removed by parliament, and Friends have followed suit; Quaker marriages may take place in any building at any time.

However, if a marriage is to take place other than in a place where a regular meeting for worship is held and/or at a time that would not be described as ‘working hours’, the area meeting will need to be clear why this is to be the case, and to ensure that a sufficient number of Friends will be able to attend the marriage to ensure that it is rightly held and in the care of the meeting.

If a venue that is registered for a civil wedding (or a venue that is not registered for weddings at all) is asked to take a booking for a Quaker wedding, then the venue may query if such a wedding can take place. A registering officer can ask Yearly Meeting staff to send a letter assuring the venue that such a wedding would be legal, and also informing them that Quakers do not charge for holding Quaker weddings, so that the booking is not a commercial activity. It remains up to a venue to decide if they will take a booking for a Quaker wedding.

In 2021 it became possible for civil weddings in England and Wales to take place outdoors in the grounds of buildings that are registered for civil marriages. In 2022, it was announced that this will be extended to the grounds of churches that are registered for religious marriages. The current advice from the Recording Clerk is that a Quaker marriage may be conducted outdoors in England and Wales, providing that

- Civil or religious weddings are permitted outside
- The area meeting agrees that the venue is suitable for a wedding.



- The registering officer and elders are sure that the declarations would be audible to those gathered in worship
- There is an indoor alternative in case of inclement weather.
- Where the couple have already given notice, the address of the place where the meeting for worship takes place is the same as the building for which notice had been given. (For example, a wedding could take place in the Meeting House garden, but not in an adjoining park next to the meeting house).

Where the couple have not yet given notice and they are considering asking for an outdoor wedding, then they should give the place of their planned wedding as the address that covers both the permanent building such as a Meeting House, and its adjoining land. The wedding can then take place either indoors or outdoors at that address. There is no current expectation for Quaker weddings to be able to take place anywhere.

Quaker area meetings are not strict geographic boundaries. However, if a couple wish to get married in a building which could reasonably be considered to be in another registering officer's 'patch' as it were, the registering officer who has been approached for the marriage should make contact with the other as a matter of courtesy.

It is possible for an area meeting to "borrow" a meeting house from another nearby area meeting to hold a wedding. This might be appropriate where more than one area meeting covers a conurbation (such as Manchester or London) and an area meeting only has small venues but a larger number of guests is desired. In such cases is it the "borrowing" area meeting that appoints the wedding and is responsible for the right holding of the meeting for worship, but it would be wise for the host local meeting to be involved and consulted at an early stage.

Note that the building (whether a meeting house or other building) cannot be locked during the wedding – it must be a public meeting for worship.

It should be borne in mind that, by arrangement with local elders, it is in right ordering for a marriage to be solemnised during a regular meeting for worship, provided that it is so appointed by the authorising area meeting or local meeting and all the formalities (legal and Quaker) have been completed.

## 11.1 Marriage of housebound or hospitalised persons

### *Quaker faith & practice* 16.36

A Quaker marriage can being held in a hospital when one of the couple is seriously ill, is not expected to recover and cannot be moved to the place where a marriage would normally be solemnised. These exceptional arrangements require close consultation between the registering officer, the area meeting clerk, the Recording Clerk and the superintendent registrar. Therefore Yearly Meeting staff should be consulted immediately if such a marriage needs to take place (see Section 21: Contacts). If it is out of office hours, then do try using social media (such as facebook) or your Quaker contacts to try to



find a way of getting a message through.

We should all be working to enable the marriage to take place, as such a marriage can bring great comfort to each of the couple.

A couple need to be aware that a marriage will revoke any existing wills. This is not the responsibility of the registering officer, but it might be something you should make sure they know.

Where one or both of the couple are not in membership, then a willingness to have a Quaker wedding is sufficient for the completion of form B/C (and D in England or Wales).

Happily section 16.44 permits an area meeting clerk to allow a wedding to proceed without having to wait for the following area meeting sessions.

If your area meeting clerk is uncontactable, then contact the recording clerk for advice.

Once the wedding has taken place, it should be reported to the area meeting (or area meetings) in the usual way, using Form H. The minute of the area meeting should include how the marriage was authorised if the area meeting did not appoint the marriage.

### **11.1.1 In England and Wales**

Legislation (Marriage (Registrar General's Licence) Act 1970) provides for a marriage to take place in circumstances where one of the couple is seriously ill and is not expected to recover. Similar provisions allow for the conversion of a civil partnership to a marriage where one of the couple is seriously ill and is not expected to recover (Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013).

If you receive an enquiry about a marriage or a conversion in such circumstances, contact BYM staff as noted in section 21. You will need to work closely with Yearly Meeting staff to ensure that our Quaker processes are followed, and with staff at the register office of the district in which the marriage is to take place, who will undertake the necessary legal preliminaries. A hospital or hospice chaplain may be able to offer assistance and advice throughout this process.

The couple will need a letter from a medical practitioner stating that:

- The doctor is in medical attendance on the person concerned.
- The person is seriously ill and is not expected to recover.
- The person cannot be moved to a place registered for marriages.
- The person understands the nature and purport of the marriage/civil partnership ceremony.

The doctor must include their qualifications as registered by the General Medical Council, which the (deputy) superintendent registrar will check.

If either of the couple has been married before, they will need to provide documents proving that they are free to remarry, i.e. a decree absolute, foreign divorce document with English translation, or dissolution document (from a previous civil partnership), or a death certificate if the previous spouse of either of the couple has died.

Marriage by Registrar General's licence will usually be at a home address, hospital or hospice. The marriage may be by civil ceremony or according to the rites of any non-Anglican denomination or according to the usages of the Jews or Society of Friends. (The Registrar General cannot grant a licence for a marriage to be solemnised according to the rites of the Church of England or the Church in Wales and where a couple in a similar situation wish to be married according to those rites they should be advised to apply for a special licence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which the church will help them to do.)

Notice of marriage must be given by only one of the couple to the (deputy) superintendent registrar of the district in which the marriage is to be solemnised. This will usually be at a registration office, but notice may be attested manually at the home, hospice or hospital.

The (deputy) superintendent registrar must be satisfied in the usual way that there is no lawful impediment to the marriage, whilst exercising the tact and sympathy the circumstances of the case may call for.

No residential qualification is required. Notice can be given and the marriage can take place in a district where neither of the couple usually resides.

Once the notice has been taken, if all necessary documents have been seen, the Registrar General will grant his licence and inform the (deputy) superintendent registrar of the decision. There is only one licence to cover the couple, rather than the usual two superintendent registrar's certificates.

A fee is payable to the Registrar General in respect of the issue of licence for marriage or civil partnership (refundable if the licence is not granted).

Once a Registrar General's licence is granted, the marriage can take place immediately (there is no minimum waiting period) or at any time within one month. After one month the licence will expire. The marriage may only be solemnised at the place shown on the licence. If the ill person is moved (e.g. to home or to a different hospital), a fresh notice must be given and a new licence obtained for the new location.

If the conditions for registering a marriage by Registrar General's licence cannot be met for any reason, it is possible that the conditions for a reduction in the 28-day notice period might apply. In such a case, your local (deputy) superintendent registrar will be able to provide further advice.

In addition, the Marriage (Registrar General's Licence) Act 1970 provides for marriages to take place in similar circumstances (often known as deathbed marriages) but without the need for one clear day to elapse between the time notice is given to the superintendent registrar and the issue of his certificate and licence. A request for the issue of the Registrar General's licence should be referred immediately to the superintendent registrar. The Marriage Act 1983 makes provision for the marriage of housebound and detained persons in England and Wales.

A marriage schedule will be issued and should be completed and returned in the usual way.

**11.1.2 In Scotland**

Only in exceptional circumstances will the Registrar General authorise a marriage to take place if 29 days' notice has not been given.

If you receive an enquiry about a marriage or a civil partnership conversion in such circumstances, contact BYM staff as noted in section 21. You will need to work closely with Yearly Meeting staff to ensure that our Quaker processes are followed, and with staff at the register office of the district in which the marriage is to take place, who will undertake the necessary legal preliminaries.

## 12. Meetings for clearness

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.37–39

Meetings for clearness have a long history within the practice of the Society of Friends worldwide. They are used by individuals seeking “clearness on changes in their life, for example, a career change or when seeking membership of the Society. They have also been at various points in the Society of Friends’ history as a part of the marriage process. Originally they were used to ensure that the persons contemplating marriage were clear of any encumbrance. Now they are most commonly used to help couples seeking a Quaker marriage to test whether marriage within the practice and understanding of the Society of Friends is right for them.

Across all the area meetings within BYM, there are between 40 and 50 marriages a year. With these figures it is likely that for many proposed marriages according to the manner of Friends neither the couple nor many of the Quakers involved with the arrangements will have experienced being present at such an occasion. A meeting for clearness can be a helpful way forward to discern the practical, spiritual and emotional impact on those taking part, especially in relation to the wish for a Quaker wedding, rather than any other form of marriage ceremony. It is a helpful way to explore the testimonies to marriage, simplicity, equality and integrity and their bearing on the arrangements for the forthcoming event and for the couple themselves and implications for their future life together.

However, in Britain Yearly Meeting there is currently no one model for how meetings for clearness for marriage are used; the practice is at the discretion of the area meeting and the registering officer.

Some area meetings make an obligatory meeting for clearness part of the marriage process, often calling them “meetings for marriage” rather than “clearness”. In these cases, the registering officer may appoint the people (usually elders or those with pastoral care experience) who attend the meeting for marriage, or the couple may choose the participants, however, these should usually include at least one elder. The focus of the meeting is the rightness of a **Quaker** marriage, rather than whether the couple should get married at all, although it is to be expected that many aspects of the couple’s relationship may come up in the course of the meeting. It should also include an explanation of a Quaker wedding especially if neither of the couple has been to a Quaker wedding.

The assumption in this case is that a meeting for clearness/marriage will take place as part of the normal practice of the area meeting has advantages. Having a formal process ensures that the experience of undertaking meetings for clearness in a sensitive way can be built up. If all couples undertake a meeting for clearness as part of the marriage process, then there is no danger of a couple feeling singled out if they are asked to undertake one because they have lesser connection to the Society of Friends, for example. The signing of Form(s) B/C can be part of the conclusion of the meeting for clearness thereby ensuring that the registering officer knows the people who are signing the Form(s) and that all the appropriate issues have been raised.

The meeting for clearness will help the couple, the registering officer, and the area/local meeting to gain a sense of whether a Quaker wedding at this time is appropriate for the couple, however, a meeting for clearness should not feel to the couple like a “test” that they have to pass, either in relation to their knowledge of Quaker processes and values, or indeed their own relationship. It needs therefore to be handled with great sensitivity.

If the couple themselves ask for a meeting for clearness around their marriage, it is usual for them to choose the people who take part, which may or may not include the registering officer.

Some registering officers make the sort of enquiries and consideration that might be part of a meeting for clearness/marriage an integral part of the first or second meeting with the couple, a meeting usually conducted with their assistant or deputy or with an elder of the area meeting, and which may itself have the depth of a meeting for clearness. The registering officer may offer a meeting for clearness/marriage as well but it will be at the couple’s behest, not the area meeting’s, and can take place at any stage during the preparations for the marriage. If registering officers and their area meetings are content that this practice is working for them, and that proper process is being followed, then there is no obligation to move to the assumption of a meeting for clearness.

Meetings for clearness, if not an assumed part of the process, may be undertaken whether one or other of the couple have been married before or where neither couple has a close connection to the Society of Friends (see section 13: Cases requiring special care). The decision on whether this is needed will be the registering officer’s.

Any meeting for clearness will normally take place after the couple have received Forms A (and B/C if non-members).

## 12.1 Suggested stages leading to a meeting for clearness

During the first meeting between the couple and the registering officer it will be helpful to establish the extent of the Quaker connections for both partners and their reason for making this request. A brief outline of their plans to date is also helpful at this stage. It is also important for the registering officer to clarify whether both are free to marry and ascertain the necessary details surrounding any previous marriage (see section 2: The application process for more on this first meeting).

The registering officer explains to the couple that the local meeting where the wedding will take place will be involved in the holding of the meeting for worship appointed for that purpose. Furthermore the marriage and the commitment being made is considered to be ‘in the care of the meeting’ so Friends share in the preparations for the event. This is likely to be a rare or even new experience for most and each marriage is special for the couple and unique to them. The registering officer sets out the clearness practice of the area meeting and invites the couple to consider names for the meeting for clearness, as well as bringing the names of possible elders and pastoral care Friends who might take part.

### 12.1.1 How many? Where? How long?

Usually between two and four other Quakers, including elders, mainly from the local meeting where the marriage will take place, are invited, plus the registering officer, who may facilitate the meeting or invite another Friend to do so. It is important that the venue is a place where everyone can feel comfortable and relaxed so any place that meets these criteria: maybe in a home or a meeting house. It will last for around one and a half hours and no more than two hours.

### 12.1.2 Preparation for everyone

It will be helpful if everyone attending has read chapter 16 of *Quaker faith & practice* and the Quaker leaflet about weddings. The couple will consider carefully why a Quaker wedding is important for them. General information about meetings for clearness is also available from the BYM website ([www.quaker.org.uk](http://www.quaker.org.uk)), and some meetings have produced their own leaflets for the couple and participants.

*Quaker faith & practice* 12.22–25 gives more helpful information about the holding of meetings for clearness in general. Registering officers who are inexperienced in holding such meetings are encouraged to consult with other registering officers. Approach BYM staff for examples of questions that can be asked. New England Yearly Meeting's publication *Living with oneself and others* is also a good resource:

<https://neym.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Living%20With%20Oneself%20and%20Others.pdf>

The couple should be closely involved at all stages and should be encouraged to consider beforehand questions they wish to ask, and what they might want/expect from the meeting.

### 12.1.3 The meeting

The facilitator, who does not need to be the registering officer, will welcome everyone and introductions can be made around the group, followed by about ten minutes of opening silent worship. The facilitator reminds everyone of the confidential nature of the meeting and introduces the purpose of the meeting: to explore the wish of the couple for a Quaker wedding and to consider how this may be taken forward by everyone present. Attentive listening and time for reflection are the significant ingredients for a meeting for clearness. As the meeting progresses it may be helpful if the facilitator gives feedback in the form of: 'It seems to me that....' '...is this how you understand it?'

### 12.1.4 Topics to be considered

It will be helpful if the registering officer outlines the form the meeting for worship appointed for the marriage will take, for the benefit of all present. Yearly meetings in North America have long made use of meetings for clearness for couples planning to marry, and many have useful advice in their books of discipline for topics that might be considered.

Each partner may be asked why they are requesting to marry in this way and how they

reached this decision, and their understanding of the significance of the marriage declaration. If there has been a previous marriage which ended in divorce or a previous longstanding relationship it will be helpful to explore the history surrounding this and any emotional and practical considerations there may be, and especially if children are involved. The couple's relationship with the local meeting will need to be explored and how this will be deepened. Wherever possible the couple should attend meeting for worship as often as they are able prior to the marriage and afterwards too if practicable. The couple may wish to explore where they will turn for support in times of difficulty. Knowledge of Quaker practices and values will be an important topic for consideration.

Where a couple wish to have the wedding take place in a place where Quaker Meetings are not generally held, it may be helpful to explore the reasons behind their choice.

Towards the end the facilitator will sum up their sense of where the meeting has reached. Occasionally it may be beneficial to hold a further meeting.

A helpful conclusion to the meeting could be a reading of the following:

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another; and not laying accusations one against the other; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

Isaac Penington, 1667

*Quaker faith & practice* 10.01



## 13. Cases requiring special care

(Especially remarriage of divorced or widowed persons and applicants with lesser connections to the Society of Friends)

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.13 and 16.40

### 13.1 Remarriage of widowed or divorced persons

The request to marry from those who have been divorced should be treated sympathetically, but with great care both for the couple and for the meeting in which they wish to be married. It is not recommended that a standing committee for consideration of such applications be created – when rarely used standing committees tend to lack cohesion. A better practice would be for the registering officer to consult a few Friends in good standing (drawn from the area meeting elders and pastoral care Friends) and when reporting to area meeting, indicate which Friends have been consulted.

A meeting for clearness may also be used (see section 12: Meetings for clearness). The registering officer needs to be clear that applicants who have been married before are 'clear' of previous relationships, whether through a meeting for clearness with the couple in either of their own meetings or a meeting arranged through elders and pastoral care Friends, and that issues such as the welfare of any surviving children of previous relationships have been discussed between the couple.

When a couple give notice to the registration service, they will need to show copies of final divorce papers or death certificates to prove the end of their previous marriage or civil partnership.

A registering officer should not sign Form F before the divorce has been totally completed,. However, if an area meeting (or local meeting if the power to appointing meetings for worship for marriage has been delegated) is held shortly before a the final divorce papers are expected and will not meet again before the date of the proposed marriage, the meeting for worship can be appointed by the clerk (see *Quaker faith & practice* 16.44), but there is no reason why the area meeting should not minute the names of the Friends expected to attend should the marriage be appointed. But a marriage cannot take place unless both of the couple are legally free to marry.

Similar care is need when one or both of the couple has been widowed. The registering officer will need to be clear that a widow or widower planning to marry again is emotionally clear to do so, and that the impact of the marriage on any children of the previous marriage has been considered.

*See also Quaker faith & practice* 22.73–79 for extracts on the ending of relationships

## 13.2 Applicants with lesser connections to the Society of Friends

With the increasing availability of information about wedding venues it is possible for an enquiry to reach a registering officer from a couple unfamiliar with the Quaker way. Quaker marriages are intended for members of the Society of Friends or regular attenders, or those who may be considered to be 'in unity with its religious nature and witness' (*Quaker faith & practice* 16.17). Sometimes an enquiry may come from a partner who grew up in the Society or went to a Quaker school or has other associations with Quakers, or from a same-sex couple who wish to have a religious marriage. The registering officer has a variety of strategies to follow before any decision is made about moving forward with the request.

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.12 is an important paragraph in this connection. *Friends speak of marriage 'in the care of' the meeting. First the meeting where the marriage is celebrated must care for the preparations for marriage..... secondly 'every meeting has a pastoral responsibility for the care of all marriages within it.....'*

In explaining about the responsibilities laid upon Friends, the registering officer can suggest that in order to make this request the couple themselves should consider their own commitment to the procedures and the Society of Friends. First and foremost this could be to attend meeting for worship in order to be reminded of or become familiar with the spiritual and corporate nature of worship and to become known to those Friends who may also be attending the marriage to create a Quaker presence. At a later date when the couple have had time to read about Quaker worship and arrangements for marriage and have attended meeting for worship regularly then the registering officer may consider offering a further meeting and the first stage of Quaker procedure.

Bear in mind that this marriage may be the start of a relationship between the Society of Friends and one or both of the couple, and care and tenderness should be exercised accordingly.

## 13.3 Couples with links to two religious or belief groups

It is possible for a church (or other religious body) and Quaker ceremony to be combined, with the agreement and sensitive negotiation with the registering officer, ministers and elders of each community, but it will need to be clear about which body is responsible for the marriage for legal and reporting purposes. Advice should be sought from Yearly Meeting staff in such an instance.

This might involve elements from both traditions being combined. If the marriage is to be the formal responsibility of the non-Quaker body, please see section 16 for how a Quaker style certificate might be worded. None of the Quaker forms will be required, nor would the formal agreement of the area meeting. Where the non-Quaker body carries responsibility, then the wedding should not be included in the online returns to the yearly meeting.

The couple may desire a Meeting for Clearness, which can take place in the usual way. One additional question to be explored might be around the nature of the marriage ceremony.

In England or Wales, if the wedding is to be held in a place not registered for marriages, then it has to be either a Jewish or a Quaker marriage.

It is not possible for two legal weddings to be held on the same day.

### 13.4 Forced or sham marriages, or concern about mental capacity (including safeguarding)

In very rare cases, a registering officer may have a concern about the mental capacity of one or both of the couple to enter into a marriage or that the marriage itself is forced or a sham marriage.

These are possible signs of a forced marriage.

- either party showing signs of emotional distress;
- either party may show signs of physical harm or assault;
- one party may do all the talking or be reluctant to let the other party be spoken to alone;
- the parties are unable to converse in the same language;
- an allegation of a forced marriage has been made by someone else.

The legal definition of a sham marriage is one entered into for the purposes of evading the provisions of United Kingdom immigration law or the immigration rules and involves at least one party who is not a relevant national.

The signs of a sham marriage may be similar to those associated with a forced marriage listed above. However, the following may also be indicative of a sham marriage.

- either party giving the impression of knowing very little about the other person;
- either party referring to notes to answer questions about the other person;
- one of the parties is seen to receive payment for the marriage;
- an allegation that it is a sham marriage has been made by a credible third person, e.g. Immigration Officer or Police Officer;
- there is little interaction between the couple; or,
- one of the parties seems unable to give the full name or address of the other person.

None of these reasons may in themselves indicate that the marriage is a sham or forced and there may be other factors which may arouse your suspicions that are not listed. But it is generally expected that it will be a combination of factors.

The registering officer should seek the support of elders in the meeting as soon as they have this concern, and contact the appropriate registrar's office and Yearly Meeting staff for guidance and support. The *Guide for Authorised Persons*, referred to in 5.2.1, gives guidance on how to proceed in such cases (see link in section 21).

When older or more vulnerable people are planning a marriage, there is sadly a possibility of one of the couple being coerced into the marriage. If you have any thoughts that a proposed marriage might include coercion, then you should treat it as a safeguarding matter and follow the area meeting safeguarding procedures.

## 13.5 Receiving an objection to a marriage

### 13.5.1 Introduction to formal objections

It is unusual, but not unknown for an objection to a marriage to be received. Any objection will need to be dealt with tenderly. Please read the whole of this section before taking any action.

The objections should be received after form E has been issued, but before the marriage has been agreed by the area (or local) meeting. See Qfp 16.31.

But even if an objection is received after Form F has been issued and the Meeting for Worship for the solemnisation of marriage has been agreed, it is still worth treating the objection seriously.

If you receive an objection, then it is important to make contact with BYM staff as soon as possible.

You will need to act without delay, but it is important to take time to sit with the situation so that you don't take any unwise actions.

The person who has the objection needs to be told that the couple will be informed of the objection.

The person objecting may withdraw their objection at any time.

### 13.5.2 Legal objections

You need to determine if it is a legal objection, perhaps one or both of the couple are already married, or there is doubt over the mental capacity of one of the couple to choose to get married, or there is another legal reason why the marriage should not take place.

If it is a legal objection, then make contact with the local registration service and ask for their advice.

### 13.5.3 Other objections

Where it is not a legal objection, then you might find the assistance of local elders and pastoral care Friends helpful, as well as the deputy/assistant registering officer (if there is one).

It is not possible to come up with a complete list of these sorts of objections. It may be that the person making the objection knows something about past behaviours of one or other of the couple.

Where the objection is not a legal impediment to the marriage, but one that is more of a pastoral care issue, then so long as both of the couple are aware of the objection, I think that it is a matter for the couple - if they wish to go ahead, then that is fine. The RO will have tested the objection by sharing it with the couple.

### **13.5.4 Communications with the couple and the person objecting**

Making an objection may be emotionally difficult. Communications with the person who objected as well as the couple will need to be approached carefully and thoughtfully.

Before speaking with the couple about the objection, you should contact the objector to let them know that the couple will need to be told the nature of the objection. It is important to do this as it is may be possible that even if the name of the objector was not mentioned, the couple would work out who they were.

We advise not meeting with either the objector or the couple alone. Any face-to-face meetings that need to take place should have an extra person who could act as an elder. Having another Friend with you (perhaps the assistant RO, LM clerk, elder, pastoral care Friend, clerk of AM, or other Friend you feel is in good standing) is to help ground the meeting as a spiritual conversation. If anyone gets heated, it may be necessary to have some quiet worship to restore calm to the situation.

It is important to make sure that the person objecting understands the actions that the registering officer will need to take. This may best be by offering to arrange a meeting with them. You will need to listen so that you understand the objection.

It might then be necessary to meet with the couple to explain the nature of the objection.

If the objection is not one that will legally stop the marriage, then you need to let both the person objecting and the couple know.

The formal response to the objector (after you have met with the couple) might be:

"I have considered your objection. My formal decision is that the reason given is not one that would stop Friends from allowing the marriage to happen under the care of our Area Meeting."

and the response to the couple might be:

"I let you know that there had been an objection to your marriage. I have had a conversation with the two of you about the nature of the objection. My formal decision is that the reason given is not one that would stop Friends from allowing the marriage to happen under the care of our Area Meeting."

In both instances you may wish to continue by suggesting that they may wish to approach pastoral care Friends if they wish to discuss any issues that this raises for them personally, but that is a separate matter.

## 14. Marriages when one or both of the couple are resident outside Great Britain

If one or both of the couple getting married are not UK citizens, they may need to check if there are any visa or immigration requirements that they have to follow.

Note that Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not part of Great Britain. If anyone getting married is normally resident in any of these places, then they should seek advice about the civil steps they need to follow.

Great care needs to be exercised in cases where it is not possible for the registering officer to interview either of the couple before the wedding.

Although video or telephone conversations are often possible, sometimes face-to-face meetings are more appropriate. In some cases it may be possible to consult with the clerk of the appropriate yearly meeting to ask for the names of suitable Friends to interview the applicant(s) or conduct a meeting for clearness. Yearly Meeting staff should be contacted for advice at an early stage when such a marriage is planned.

It is important to remember that to get married in England or Wales, residency needs to be established before civil notice can be given.

## 15. Non-Quaker weddings or civil partnerships in Quaker meeting houses

Registering officers may be asked for advice when a local meeting receives a request to hold a non-Quaker wedding in a meeting house. This request may, for example, come from a group which hires the meeting house.

In England and Wales other groups and organisations cannot hold a wedding in a Quaker meeting house as meeting houses are not registered for marriages or civil partnerships.

If a Meeting House is hired out to a church or other faith group for their worship services, then there may be an enquiry from that group about the Quaker Meeting House being used for religious weddings. If your meeting house is asked to consider this, then please contact appropriate Yearly Meeting staff before taking any action. In England or Wales, this would generally only be possible if the Meeting House was registered as a place where marriages could take place.

It is possible for a Meeting House to be used as a venue for a wedding reception or for non-official marriage ceremonies, where the actual marriage is going to be a civil marriage or civil partnership taking place at a different venue.

This becomes a lettings issue, but it is important that as far as possible it is made clear that such an event is not a legal wedding or civil partnership.



## 16. Meetings for commitment and other ceremonies

*See Quaker faith & practice 16.66–16.67*

A registering officer may be approached by couples wanting some form of commitment ceremony within a meeting for worship which does not have any element of the legal process within it.

This might be because they have strong connections with another faith or another church as well as Quakers, and have decided that the other body should host and supervise the legal ceremony.

However, it may be the case where a couple have already married in a civil or religious (not Quaker) ceremony that they wish to celebrate within a meeting for worship as well. In other cases, the couple may have some reason not to get legally married but may still wish to have a celebration of their commitment.

Such meetings are properly under the care of local elders but it could be beneficial if the registering officer is aware of any such occasions as their input may be sought by elders.

So long as everyone is clear that it is not a marriage, then the registering officer may participate in the right holding of the event. (Before marriage equality was achieved, we advised that registering officers should not perform any official or formal role at same-sex marriages which could not be reported to the state as a legal relationship.)

In any conversations there may be with elders, the registering officer will wish to stress that on the occasion of a meeting for worship of this nature it should be absolutely clear that it is not a marriage according to Quaker usage. That said, it is clearly desirable that all that can be done should be done to ensure that the wishes of the couple are met and that they feel the support of the gathered group.

If the couple wish to make a declaration, it is desirable that it should be in terms which are confirmatory (e.g. “Friends, in the presence of this meeting I wish to confirm that I have taken my Friend...”). If the precise words of the declaration in the form used in a marriage according to our usage are seen to be very precious to the couple, the situation may be met by a statement at the outset that the meeting for worship is in confirmation of an earlier civil marriage, or marriage according to other usage.

For example “Friends, at our civil partnership/marriage earlier <today> or <on [date]> at [place]) I took this my partner/spouse/husband/wife AB, promising, through divine assistance, to be unto her/him/them, a loving and faithful partner/spouse/husband/wife, so long as we both on earth shall live.”

(With the variations in section 4: The declaration).

A certificate in the style of a Quaker marriage certificate could then read:

AB of [address] or [parentage], and CD of [address] or [parentage], following their marriage/civil partnership at [place] on [date] were present at a meeting for worship appointed by [name of local meeting] meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at [place] on [date]

In the course of the meeting, taking each other by the hand, AB said:

CD said:

Followed by the rest of the certificate wording as set out in *Quaker faith & practice* 16.58–59

Our Yearly Meeting in 1944 stated clearly that the Quaker certificate of marriage is to be used only in the case of marriages according to our usage since (among other reasons) the certificate states that “the proceedings were allowed by the proper officers of ... area meeting”.

If some written record is desired it can be drawn up in a confirmatory way, saying that following the legal marriage a meeting for worship was held at such-and-such a place on such a day, that AB and CD made declarations confirming the marriage to one another, and that those present have signed the document as a token of their support. Advice on wording is available from Yearly Meeting staff. The phrase “allowed by the proper officers of” should not appear in a certificate of this type.

If any potential difficulties over proposed meetings for worship should prove unresolvable between the elders and the couple, the registering officer should advise that the matter be laid before the area meeting.

Any minutes agreed by the local or area meeting recording such a ceremony should be clear either in wording or in the omission of certain words, that the ceremony was not a marriage allowed by the proper officers. These ceremonies should not be included in the online marriage returns to Britain Yearly Meeting.

## 17. Responsibilities of the area meeting

### 17.1 Appointment of the meeting for worship

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.21, 16.41–45

Meetings for worship for marriage are appointed by the area meeting, unless an area meeting has specifically delegated this responsibility to one or more of its local meetings.

The area meeting may grant permission to a local meeting in its area, where a meeting for worship is held weekly, to appoint meetings for worship for the solemnisation of marriage at its usual venue. (first sentence of 16.43)

This will only be done where the area meeting can be assured that the local meeting has sufficient understanding of the process, can ensure that enough Friends will be available to attend any marriage, and overall, is capable of discharging the responsibility. This delegation should be reviewed every few years. In any case where a local meeting has this responsibility but where there is any issue in relation to a specific marriage, the area meeting should take over the responsibility for the appointment of the marriage.

The registering officer should be informed by the area meeting clerk if any of the constituent local meetings may appoint a meeting for worship for marriage.

The appointing meeting (whether area or local meeting) should make sure that a sufficient number of Friends are able to attend any meeting for worship for marriage.

Registering officers should be aware of their area meeting's process for making between meetings decision, especially since many area meetings no longer meet monthly, and in exceptional cases, decisions on appointing meeting for worship for marriage may be needed. Knowledge of the schedule for area meetings will help in the planning process.

### 17.2 Appointing the registering officer and deputy

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.22

Registering officers should be appointed by each area meeting to be responsible for Quaker marriages within their area meeting. The area meeting clerk has the responsibility to notify Yearly Meeting staff, who in turn notify the authorities as detailed in section 6.1 (above).

Many area meetings also appoint a deputy or assistant registering officer, to aid the registering officer in his or her duties. However, in England and Wales, an assistant or deputy registering officer may not sign box 11 of the marriage schedule; only formally appointed registering officers may do so. In Scotland it is possible for area meetings to appoint deputy registering officers, whose names should be notified to the Registrar General for Scotland, after which they may act as registering officers.

In the event of the sudden death or incapacity of a registering officer the Recording Clerk must be consulted immediately. It may be necessary to hold a special area meeting to appoint a new registering officer. The deputy or assistant registering officer, who will have

had some training, may be formally appointed as registering officer in this eventuality, which is another advantage in appointing a deputy or assistant. A temporary appointment of the registering officer from a neighbouring area meeting may be possible.

See section 6: Role and appointment of the registering officer for more on this.

### 17.3 What needs to be minuted?

#### *Quaker faith & practice* 16.63

Minutes need to be agreed to record the appointment of the marriage and afterwards noting that the marriage has taken place.

It is normally the area meeting which appoints the meeting for worship for marriage (unless this has been formally delegated to a local meeting), and the request for the appointment of the meeting for worship is sent by the registering officer on Form F soon as possible after Forms A (and B/C if required) have been completed.

It is incumbent on the area meeting to make sure that a sufficient number of Friends from the area meeting intend to be present at the meeting for worship for marriage.

Once the meeting for worship has been appointed by minute of the area meeting, the clerk will return to the registering officer Part II of Form F giving confirmation and the registering officer sends Part III to the couple advising them of the decision.

After the wedding, Form H reports to area meetings both that the marriage has been solemnised and that it has been legally registered. The registering officer sends copies of Form H to the area meeting within which the meeting for worship for marriage took place, and to the area meetings where one or both of the couple are in membership, if that is different from where the marriage took place (this could require reporting the marriage to three different area meetings, if the couple getting married are each a member of a different area meeting, and the marriage is held in a third area meeting.).

The area meetings that receive Form H should minute the accomplishment of the marriage in the minutes of the area meeting, giving the names of the couple, their membership status, and the date and place of the marriage.

If someone getting married is in membership, and is moving house around the time of marriage, it will be appropriate for the registering officer to raise with them at some point in advance of the marriage the question of transferring their membership to a more appropriate meeting after the marriage has taken place, but this is not a formal responsibility of the registering officer.

### 17.4 Reporting the marriage

#### *Quaker faith & practice* 16.61

The registering officer is responsible for reporting marriages to the Yearly Meeting, details of marriages are no longer requested on the tabular statement form which is completed

by the Area Meeting Clerk or Membership Clerk. There are two online forms you will need to complete: information about them is to be found in section 7.

## 18. Responsibilities of local meetings

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.47 and 16.49

Although the meeting for worship for marriage is generally formally appointed by the area meeting, the local meeting is the body under whose care the marriage takes place. It is therefore essential that elders/pastoral care Friends are involved in the preparation from an early stage, and that the meeting as whole is notified formally as soon as possible. This will normally be when Form E (public notice of intention) is read out after meeting for worship.

In some meetings, the intended marriage goes to the local business meeting as an item on its agenda, so that the meeting can collectively make sure that functions such as doorkeeping are covered, and that a good number of Friends, sufficient to ensure the right holding of the meeting for worship, intend to be present. Although no formal minute needs to be sent to the area meeting from this item, it is helpful to area meeting to know that the local meeting is at one with the proposed marriage and that plans are being made, and how many Friends intend to be there.

The registering officer could in this case write to the clerk asking for the item on the local business meeting agenda, giving the salient details (names, date, etc.), and reminding the local meeting that the area meeting appoints the meeting for worship for marriage, but the marriage takes place under the care of the local meeting who also need to handle some practicalities (and spell out what those practicalities are).

A possible minute from the local meeting might read:

The registering officer informs us that the area meeting will be asked to appoint a meeting for worship for marriage for the solemnisation of the marriage of (name) (membership status) and (name) (membership status) to be held in this meeting house (or address of other place where the marriage is to be held) on (date) at (time).

*We endorse this request. If the meeting for worship is so appointed:*

- we note that at least (number) Friends intend to be present
- elders have appointed two of their number to close the meeting
- we ask (name) to act as doorkeeper.

*[and any other matters that seem to be relevant]*

*A copy of this minute is to be sent to area meeting.*

If a registering officer adopts this procedure, the dates of local business meetings also need to be factored into the timetable. A gap in local business meeting dates should not hold up the request for the appointment of the meeting for worship for marriage by the area meeting, as the local meeting can consider the practicalities after the meeting for worship has been appointed.

It is not, however, essential for the intended marriage to come to a formal local meeting for business; the practicalities and arrangements may be carried out by elders directly.

## 18.1 When a local meeting appoints the marriage

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.43,

In a small number of area meetings, the area meeting has granted permission to a local meeting in its area to appoint meetings for worship for the solemnisation of marriage at its usual venue. This can only happen when the local meeting holds meetings for worship weekly.

In this circumstance, the local meeting will receive form F from the registering officer, and will need to minute agreement (or otherwise) to the proposed marriage. It is important to note that such a local meeting can only appoint a meeting for worship for the solemnisation of marriage at its usual venue.

Once the meeting for worship has been appointed by minute of the local meeting, the clerk will return to the registering officer Part II of Form F giving confirmation and the registering officer sends Part III to the couple advising them of the decision.

In all cases, Form H is sent to the area meeting.



## 19. Civil partnership conversions

Between July 2009 and 28 March 2014 in England and Wales, and July 2009 and 30 December 2014 in Scotland, same-sex marriages could take place within Quaker meetings, as long as a civil partnership had also taken place either before the meeting for worship in a register office, or within the meeting for worship of marriage, where the Quaker meeting house had been registered with the local authority for the holding of civil partnerships.

Since the above dates, all couples are able to marry following the same processes, and with the marriage being recorded in the same way. Therefore, Britain Yearly Meeting has decided that civil partnerships should no longer take place within Quaker meeting houses, and that any registration will simply be allowed to lapse, rather than being renewed when it expires.

Civil partnerships are now available to opposite sex couples.

If a couple approach a registering officer to ask for a civil partnership, they need to be told that these cannot take place under the auspices of Friends. We offer marriages or if this is not desired, then a meeting to mark their relationship may be possible (see section 16)

### 19.1 Conversion of civil partnership to marriages

*Quaker faith & practice* 16.16

Same-sex couples who are civil partners and wish to convert this to a marriage in a Quaker meeting for worship may do so, where this is permitted by law. Yearly Meeting staff must be consulted at the earliest point where this is requested. Processes have been developed for the conversion of a civil partnership into a marriage under the auspices of a Quaker meeting, which permit some leeway. These can be obtained from Yearly Meeting staff on request. See sections 8.1.1 and 8.2.1 for more details.

In 2013 and 2014, laws were passed that enabled same-sex marriages to take place. Same-sex marriages were possible in England and Wales from 29 March 2014 and in Scotland from 31 December 2014. Conversions from civil partnerships were possible in England and Wales from 10 December 2014 and in Scotland from 16 December 2014.

When the ability to convert was introduced, only civil partnerships registered in Scotland could be converted into a marriage in Scotland and equally a civil partnership in England or Wales can only be converted into a marriage in England or Wales. This is still the case in England and Wales.

In Scotland it is now possible to convert a civil partnership into a marriage regardless of the place or the original civil partnership (or equivalent in other jurisdictions). It is not yet known how a conversion in Scotland of a civil partnership contracted in England or Wales

will be regarded by the official bodies in England and Wales.

At the time of writing it is not possible for opposite sex couples to convert a civil partnership into a marriage. If it becomes possible and a couple enquire about converting their civil partnership into a marriage in a Quaker setting, then please contact Yearly Meeting staff for advice.

## 20. Checklists

### 20.1 Checklist 1: Matters to be discussed with the couple

- Make sure they have made contact with elders of the meeting where the wedding is to take place, and have checked the meeting house is available at the date and time desired.
- Information about a Quaker wedding: couples often send out the leaflets 'A Quaker Wedding' and 'Your first time in a Quaker meeting' with their invitations or have the information from these leaflets on their wedding websites.
- Numbers: The couple should be asked at an early stage of the number expected so that local Friends are aware of the size of the wedding to be supported spiritually and practically. On seating arrangements, it should be decided where they wish to sit, where elders and the registering officer will sit (both these need to be in good view of the meeting as a whole), and whether reserved seats are needed for immediate family/friends/witnesses. The couple should also be asked if they are expecting children or babies at the wedding and if children are expected, they are reminded that they will need to make arrangements.
- Seating: How the meeting house is to be arranged, including the reserving of any seats, and who will do this, and when.
- Entrance: Do the couple want to come into the meeting room with their guests, or wait till there is a gathered silence to come into? Elders need to be briefed accordingly.
- Dress: It is appropriate to ask about their intentions and to remind them gently of the Quaker testimony to simplicity, if necessary.
- Flowers: If either or both of the couple are to carry flowers, they should be placed on the central table during the meeting for worship.
- Wording of declaration and certificate: The various possibilities of wording should be discussed and agreed before the certificate is written..
- Signing the Quaker certificate: It is helpful for the couple to assign someone as the "keeper of the certificate" to oversee the signing of the Quaker certificate and encourage all those present to do so at the conclusion of the meeting for worship. The couple should supply lightfast pens for signing, but registering officers may find it helpful to have a couple of these with them. It should also be clear who will take the certificate away at the end of the wedding.
- Presents: It is also helpful for a guest to be designated to take care of any presents brought to the meeting house.
- Witnesses: who will the couple have as their witnesses? The couple have to have two witnesses at their wedding, who will sign the civil marriage schedule. In England and Wales, they can choose to have up to six witnesses, provided the details fit in the appropriate place on the schedule.

- Signing the marriage schedule: the couple and their witness will need to withdraw to a quiet room with the Registering Officer to check and sign the schedule, shortly after the end of the meeting for worship. The couple need to be aware that this will happen and not stray too far from each other or their witnesses until this has taken place.

## 20.2 Checklist 2: Matters to be considered with local Friends

- Elders: Once elders have been appointed for the meeting of worship for marriage, it is helpful for the registering officer to have a conversation about the arrangements with them (a meeting for this purpose with the couple present may also be helpful.)
- Doorkeeping: It is common that the majority of people attending a wedding have never been into a Friends' meeting house and have never attended a meeting for worship. They may be approaching the wedding with some apprehension. It is, therefore, important that the local meeting arranges for a doorkeeper to be present well before the first guest is expected to arrive. This Friend should be good at welcoming people and putting them at their ease. There should be enough local Friends on hand to direct visitors to cloakrooms, toilets and the meeting room. Generally there will also need to be some arrangements in place for welcoming latecomers.
- Car parking: Local car parking arrangements should be clarified beforehand and notified to guests with the invitations to the wedding.
- Presents: Guests may bring bulky presents to the meeting for worship. There should be secure arrangements for taking care of them and for conveying them to the couple after the wedding: this is also the responsibility of the couple.
- Stewards: Guests are likely to be uncertain where they should sit in the meeting room and it may be helpful to have more than one person at the door to help with distributing them throughout the room.
- Seating: Seats need to be reserved for the couple, for their official witnesses and for the registering officer. In addition seats may be reserved for certain relatives and friends. Reserved seats need to be indicated in some way, or stewards should be briefed to ensure that they remain vacant. The elders who are to close the meeting should sit together where they can be seen by the registering officer.
- Flowers: Local Friends may be glad to help with providing flowers in the meeting house. Any flowers on the central table should not be too dominant. Those arranging the flowers will need to know if either or both of the couple plan to carry flowers that are to be placed on the central table during the meeting for worship. If there are to be flowers in water on the central table, bear in mind they should be kept well away from the certificate.
- Music: Any wishes of the couple with regard to music should be discussed with local elders. It can help the gathering of the meeting without talking if there is

some appropriate music while guests are entering the meeting room, as long as someone who is familiar with Friends' practices is looking after any equipment. Similarly there may be occasions on which it is appropriate to have some music during the signing of the certificate by guests following the conclusion of the meeting for worship. The programmed use of music during the meeting for worship itself should only occur with the agreement of elders.

- **Introduction to the meeting:** It is common for guests to be welcomed and for the meeting to be introduced as soon as the couple has entered. It is helpful for local elders to know who is going to do this; it is usually the registering officer. Sample introductions are given in Section 24 of this handbook.
- **Children:** If possible, children should be encouraged to remain in the meeting and parents may need reassurance about the appropriateness of this. If parents wish to take their children out, they should be asked not to do this until after the declarations. If the couple are expecting many children to attend, the local meeting may wish to provide a crèche facility, or the couple may make their own provision – using the children's room of the meeting house if there is one.
- **Length of the meeting for worship:** Although the closing of the meeting is a matter for elders, registering officers may be asked for guidance. Bearing in mind that many present may not have attended a silent meeting previously, most weddings last rather less than an hour, about 45 minutes being usual.
- **Photographs and recording:** Photographs and video recording during the meeting for worship should normally not take place, and it is desirable for reference to be made to this during the introduction to the meeting. It may be appropriate to announce a time for taking photographs of the couple at the close of the meeting. If a professional photographer is invited it is essential that a full briefing be given by the registering officer about what is permissible. It may be possible, at the registering officer's discretion, to invite one person to photograph the signing of the schedule
- **If the meeting for worship is a blended meeting (online as well as in person),** someone not otherwise involved in the meeting for worship should be assigned to manage the online access. It is helpful to take a screen shot of the participants at the time the declarations are made as an aide memoire to the couple as to who is entitled to sign the Quaker certificate at a later stage if that is desired by the couple.
- **Announcements:** At the close of the meeting it is common for an elder to make any necessary announcements, for example about the signing of the certificate and about the serving of refreshments.
- **Signing the Quaker certificate:** Permanent and lightfast black fountain or roller-type pens should be provided by the couple. Guests should be discouraged from signing using their own pens as these will not contain lightfast ink – this might be a task for one of the stewards or for a friend of the couple. Neat signing by a large number of witnesses is assisted by ruling faint pencil lines to extend those provided to the edges of the scroll, and by dividing the space into

columns.

- Signing the legal schedule: It is necessary to arrange a quiet place (and a stable table) where the registering officer and couple can check and sign the schedule, which can then be signed by their witnesses.
- Refreshments: The couple's requirements need to be discussed with local Friends to ensure that they are practical for the number of participants expected and that they are consistent with local Friends' feelings (for example, about the consumption of alcohol).
- Confetti: Any use of confetti should be discouraged.
- It is important to ensure that arrangements are in place for clearing up after the wedding.

### 20.3 Checklist 3: For the couple

- Check that the meeting house is available on the date and time desired
- Arrange for sponsoring Friends for the non-member(s)
- Complete form A, plus B/C as necessary; return form to the registering officer
- Arrange meeting for clearness (if required or desired) with registering officer and local Friends
- Give notice to the civil authorities
- Be clear how the marriage schedule will be provided. Will it be sent? Will the couple have to collect it?
- Obtain from the Quaker Centre bookshop in Friends House or download leaflets to go with invitations
- Consult with elders of local meeting re. doorkeeping, car parking, seating arrangements and other details
- Flowers – not too high or spreading on central table
- A quiet place with a stable table for the signing of the schedule.
- Obtain the schedule from the superintendent registrar (England and Wales) or the district registrar (Scotland): this must be with registering officer at least 24 hours before the wedding
- Agree and arrange order of entry into meeting/welcome at door
- Introduction to wedding – who will do this? Are there specific things it needs to contain, such as arrangements for children?
- Wording of declarations – which alternatives may be used (the Quaker certificate must match the declarations used)
- Quaker certificate commissioned or written out, and checked, and pens provided

(with lightfast or record ink)

- Prompt cards for declarations if needed
- To know where the camera is if it is a blended meeting.
- Signal between the couple for making declarations agreed
- Names of witnesses supplied to registering officer in writing
- Elders to close the meeting

## 20.4 Checklist 4: For the wedding day for registering officers

The following is a list of items that might be taken on the day of the marriage, followed by a list of points to check at the meeting house:

- Forms A, B/C, E, F and G
- The legal schedule
- A stamped and addressed envelope to return the marriage schedule
- Cards with the wording of the declarations which the couple will use
- A board on which the Quaker certificate is to be mounted and drafting tape or appropriate clips or weights for the purpose; (unless this is to be provided by the couple)
- The Quaker certificate (if in the registering officer's possession) and a spare copy
- A cardboard roll for the Quaker certificate (unless this is to be provided by the couple)
- A pen or pens filled with registration or permanent ink (to be used for all entries and signatures on the marriage schedule)
- Permanent black pens for use by those signing the Quaker certificate
- A pencil and pencil eraser
- A copy of *Quaker faith & practice* and the current version of Chapter 16.

The registering officer will want to check through the following points on arriving at the meeting house:

- check the positions of reserved seating;
- to know where the camera is if it is a blended meeting
- place the cards with the declarations on the table where the couple will see them (historically, it was customary for the man to be on the right and the woman on the left.)
- mount the Quaker certificate on the board (unless the couple are doing this)
- brief the doorkeeper and stewards about their duties, especially about watching over



the signing of the Quaker certificate

- brief whoever is to take charge of the certificate when all have signed it, and whoever is to take charge of any presents
- identify those who will witness the Quaker certificate during the meeting for Worship and tell them where to sit, brief them about the procedure for signing that certificate. (Note that these need not be the same people as the official witnesses who will sign the civil document)
- identify the official witnesses who will sign the schedule after the wedding and brief them about the procedure for signing the schedule after the wedding. (This will be two people in Scotland or two to six people in England or Wales).
- check the arrangements for the place where the schedule is to be checked and signed
- talk with the couple and reassure them that all arrangements are complete; confirm with them the arrangements for entering the meeting room.

## 21. Contacts and resources

### Britain Yearly Meeting staff contacts

Michael S Booth  
Church Government Adviser  
Friends House  
173 Euston Road  
London, NW1 2BJ  
[wedding@quaker.org.uk](mailto:wedding@quaker.org.uk) 020 7663 1023

### Recording Clerk

Paul Parker  
[rc@quaker.org.uk](mailto:rc@quaker.org.uk) 020 7663 1161

**In an emergency we may be found on social media, including facebook**, or use any Quaker connections you or your meeting has to try to contact us.

For copies of forms and changes of registering officers  
Graham Spackman  
[wedding@quaker.org.uk](mailto:wedding@quaker.org.uk) 020 7663 1021

### General Register Office

[GROcasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:GROcasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk) 0300 123 1837

### Ink

Ecclesiastical Stationary Supplies  
[www.registrarsink.co.uk](http://www.registrarsink.co.uk) 01440 703303

### *Guide for Authorised Persons*

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-for-authorised-persons](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-for-authorised-persons)

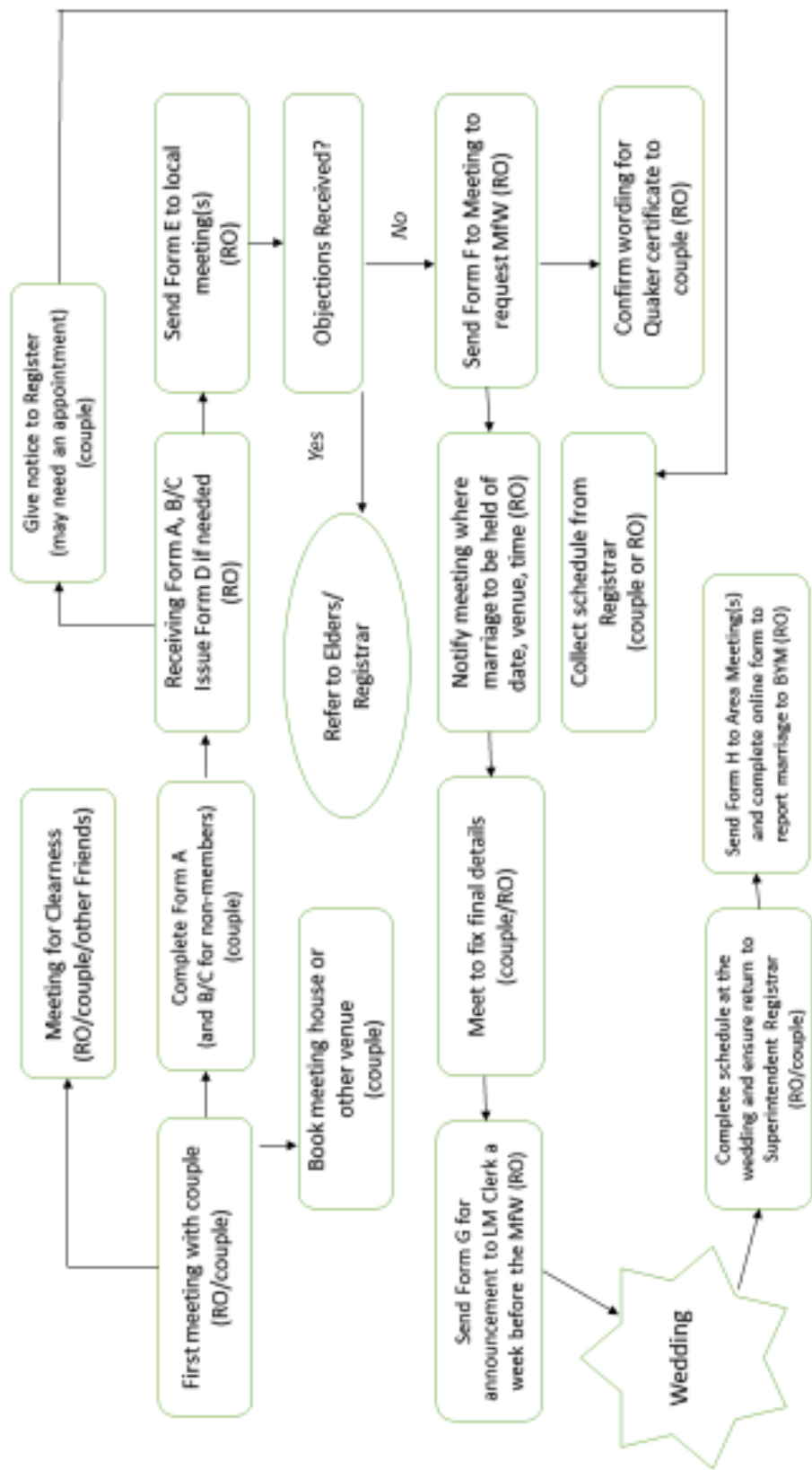
### Advice for couples

England and Wales  
[www.gov.uk/marriages-civil-partnerships](http://www.gov.uk/marriages-civil-partnerships)  
[www.gov.uk/order-copy-birth-death-marriage-certificate](http://www.gov.uk/order-copy-birth-death-marriage-certificate)

### Scotland

[www.nrscotland.gov.uk/registration/getting-married-in-scotland/how-do-i-go-about-it](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/registration/getting-married-in-scotland/how-do-i-go-about-it)  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/content/certificates-and-copies](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/content/certificates-and-copies)

22. Flowchart



## 23. Sample completed forms

This section will be made available separately

## 24 Sample introductions to a wedding

On the following pages are a number of different sample introductions that you might like to adapt and use at a Quaker marriage.

### Welcome and introduction to Quaker wedding

#### (Local elder)

On behalf of the Borsetshire Area Quaker Meeting, may I extend a very warm welcome to everyone here this afternoon on this happy occasion. **First some practicalities:** In the unlikely event of an emergency, the fire exits are through front door you came in by and assemble on the common opposite, or if that way is blocked, turn right and out of the back doors into the garden and assemble at the far end of the first part. Toilets are near the front doors on the left.

There is no smoking anywhere in the building, Please go to the pavement at the front of the building if you need to smoke. There is an induction loop for people with hearing aids, who will need to switch their aids to the T setting. When moving around this room later, please be aware of the step at the sides and three at the front. Please switch off mobile phones and refrain from photography until after the meeting, when you are very welcome to take pictures. **Children** are very welcome to stay, but if they make it clear they would rather be elsewhere, the garden is outside to the right, and also a small room is available where their carer can entertain them. Hopefully, they can be persuaded to stay at least until Ian and Adam have made their declarations, so everyone here can witness to their marriage and sign the certificate afterwards.

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#### (Registering officer)

As many people here may not have experienced a Quaker meeting for the solemnisation of marriage before, let me, as the Quaker registering officer, give a few words of explanation of what is going to happen.

Like all Quaker meetings for worship, our meeting today is based on silence, since it is our custom to wait quietly, hoping to become more aware of the promptings of love and truth in our hearts. This quiet may be deepened if anyone feels strongly moved to speak in a way that will contribute. There is a pause for reflection between contributions.

The basis of a Friends marriage remains the same as in the early days of the Society. The couple, together with their friends, gather in worship. With their declaration they take each other freely and equally as life-long partners, committing themselves to joining their lives together in loving companionship, asking God's blessing on their union. (*Quaker faith & practice* 16.04)

Early in the meeting after a period of silence, and when they feel it is right, Ian and Adam will take each other by the hand, and stand to make their simple, solemn declarations to each other, which constitutes their spiritual and legal marriage. They have chosen to exchange rings at this point. (?) I will then ask them and two witnesses to sign the marriage certificate on the table. I will then read this out, and after the close of the meeting, you will all be invited to sign as witnesses.

We will then return to silence, and during this time, all are invited to support Ian and Adam with spoken or silent or even sung words, prayers or readings and wishes for their future together. Please stand if you can, speak as clearly as you can and be mindful of allowing time for other contributions.

The meeting will last between 45 and 60 minutes, its end being signified by the elders sitting...shaking hands – and then everyone is encouraged to greet their neighbours likewise.

### **After (assistant registering officer)**

The registering officer will retire to another room to record the marriage on the marriage schedule, and will be joined by Ian and Adam and their chosen witnesses.

Tea, coffee and light refreshments will be served upstairs to all shortly. They can be brought down and into the garden, but please keep them away from the certificate. There is also a stairlift on the stairs nearest to the toilets.

Please be sure to sign the certificate, using the non-fade pen provided.

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### **Introduction for wedding**

On behalf of Dorsetshire Area Quaker Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends and of Ambridge Local Meeting Friends, as registering officer I welcome you all to this meeting for worship specially appointed for the solemnisation of the marriage of Florence and Hamish.

Whenever we have guests and visitors joining us who may not be used to Quaker ways, say at a wedding, we think it could be helpful to have a few words of introduction. Other churches use the word 'service'; Quakers speak of a 'meeting for worship', and we are about to meet for worship. Other churches use set hymns, prayers and readings; Quakers meet in silent expectation for the Spirit to prompt them to speak or act. In other churches services are led by a minister or priest; Quakers believe anyone can be inspired to minister, whoever they are and whether or not they are actually a Quaker. Ministry is usually something shared to edify or bless those present but it can equally include solemn marriage commitments, like today.

We believe a uniting in marriage is wholly and solely God's work. The couple who are called to be married have full authority to wed each other; they do not need any minister or priest to make it official. We, all of us, are simply witnesses to what the couple say then sign their names to.

We shall enter into worship today after I have finished this introduction, and the meeting will last approximately 45 minutes. In the course of the meeting for worship Florence and Hamish, when they are ready, will take each other's hand and make their declarations. (They will then exchange rings). After that, in keeping with Quaker tradition, they will both formally sign the certificate that is on the table before them and their two principal witnesses will also sign confirming what has taken place. I shall then read the certificate aloud for all to hear. All that completed, they will be fully married but the meeting for worship will continue and we hope anyone who feels moved to speak will share what is on their heart.

There are elders appointed for the meeting, and when they discern the time is right they will close the meeting with a handshake. At that point there will be an announcement about what happens next, but you need to be aware that the couple, the two witnesses and I shall need to move without delay from the meeting house to ... for the legal part of the proceedings.

### **The marriage of partner one and partner two**

Friends, I am very happy to welcome you all to Ambridge Friends Meeting house for this special meeting for the marriage of Sophie and Erin.

A few words of introduction to Quaker marriage might be helpful. Our marriage arrangements are not the same as a standard church wedding, but the promises made are fully recognised by the State, and just as binding. The moment the promises have been made, Sophie and Erin will be legally married.

George Fox was the founder of the Society of Friends (which is the proper name for the Quakers). In 1669 George Fox said:

“For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not of the priests or the magistrates; for it is God’s ordinance and not man’s; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together; for we marry none; it is the Lord’s work, and we are but the witnesses.”

As witnesses, we are all here to ask God’s blessing on the marriage of Sophie and Erin and to support them in their marriage.

Quaker meetings are based on silent worship and communion with the Divine Spirit, in which there is opportunity for spoken ministry arising from that communion and from the life of the meeting. Today during our meeting, Partner 1 and Partner 2 will make their promises. After they have done so, the meeting will continue in silent worship – but any person here, whether a Quaker or not, may speak in ministry. This ministry may simply be words of support or encouragement for Sophie and Erin. Everyone will contribute anyway simply by being here and supporting Sophie and Erin in silence.

Towards the end of the meeting, I as registering officer will ask Sophie and Erin to sign the wedding certificate, which will also be signed by two witnesses. I shall then read the certificate to the meeting. After the certificate has been read we shall resume silent worship until the end of the meeting is signified by the Elders shaking hands.

At the end of the meeting, Sophie and Erin, the two witnesses, the assistant registering officer Georgina Fox, and myself will withdraw to complete the signing of the civil marriage registers. You are asked to remain here while this is being done, and during that time you are asked to sign the Quaker marriage certificate as witnesses to Sophie and Erin’s marriage. This is a tradition that has lasted through the centuries, started when the State did not recognise Quaker weddings. The Quaker marriage certificate will be treasured by Sophie and Erin as a record of this day.

When the signing is complete you are all invited to stay for light refreshments.



The taking of photographs is not appropriate during the meeting for worship, and we would also ask you not to use any confetti anywhere in the building or grounds. If you have a mobile phone with you, could you now please check it is switched off.

We will now continue in silent worship.

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## **Introduction to the Quaker meeting for worship**

Thank you to ... and the musicians for leading us in those hymns and prayers ....

We will now move into the silence of a Quaker meeting for worship to solemnise this marriage.

It is good to allow a little time for the meeting to settle. As we enter the silence together we can become closer to one another and to God. If you are unfamiliar with Quaker ways you may find it helpful to pray silently for Florence and Hamish or just to hold them supportively in your thoughts. We might also remember that, in George Fox's words 'the right joining in marriage ... is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses'.

When Florence and Hamish are ready, they will stand, take one another by the hand and make their solemn declarations of marriage to each other. This is the point at which they are married.

After this, when the time seems appropriate, they will sign the Quaker marriage certificate in confirmation of their declarations. Two witnesses will also sign. I will read the certificate aloud. These elements: the declarations, followed by the signing and reading of the certificate in the gathered meeting are the essential components of a Quaker wedding.

After Florence and Hamish have exchanged their vows, the meeting will continue. During this time anyone who feels moved to may speak in 'ministry'. If you feel called to speak it is helpful, if you can, to 'stand up, look up, and speak up' so that all may hear you. It is also helpful if contributions are brief, and if there is a period of silent reflection between them.

The meeting for worship formally finishes when the elders shake hands. We anticipate that the meeting will last for about thirty minutes.

We hope that, in the silence, and in any vocal ministry, Florence and Hamish will feel, like Thomas and Mary Ellwood in 1669 and many other couples since, "the Lord with us and joining us, the sense whereof remained with us all our lifetime, and was of good service and very comfortable to us on all occasions."

## **Welcome**

Good afternoon friends and a very warm welcome to Ambridge meeting house and to this very happy occasion, the marriage of Arnold and Doris. It is lovely to see so many people here to witness and celebrate this joyful time.

As I expect many of you will not have attended a Quaker wedding before, I would just like to say a few words about Quaker weddings and to explain what will happen.

My name is Georgina Fox and I am the registering officer for the local Quakers. My role is to ensure that all the legal requirements are fulfilled and to facilitate the Quaker process. In

a Quaker wedding, no one marries the couple; they marry each other in a very simple ceremony. We are all the witnesses. Quaker worship is based largely on silence, with spoken contributions from any who feel called to speak. Please could we start with a period of silence. When Arnold and Doris are ready, they will stand and make their promises to each other. Following this, they, their witnesses and I will move to the table and sign the Quaker marriage certificate, which I will then read out loud.

After this, anyone who feels they would like to speak is welcome to do so. Please stand to do this if you are able and speak clearly. It is good to have a short period of silence between each spoken contribution. The close of the meeting will be signalled by the elders shaking hands, and we will then all shake hands with the people near us.

Please don't take photos during the ceremony; there will be an opportunity afterwards. Children are very welcome to be present throughout but if your child becomes restless, there is childcare in the Quiet Room.

### **At close of meeting**

Please remain in your seats to allow for photos to be taken.

After this Arnold and Doris, their witnesses and I will adjourn to another room to sign the civil paperwork. It is a Quaker tradition that all who are present at the marriage sign the Quaker marriage certificate as witnesses not only to the ceremony but also to their continued concern for the success of the marriage. While we are signing the civil register, could you please all sign the Quaker certificate. Please use the pens and ink provided as the ink is registrars' ink that does not fade. There will be friends to facilitate the process of signing.

Afterwards there is tea and cake for everyone in the lecture room, so please go and help yourself. There will also be more photo opportunities.

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### **Welcome**

A very warm welcome to Ambridge Friends Meeting house, as we meet together to witness the marriage of Dougal and Geraint. A particularly warm welcome to their families – I know some of you have travelled a long way to be here!

There is no fire drill planned, so if the fire alarm should sound, please remain seated, and the elders will give instructions about how to evacuate the building. There are two fire escapes from the top of the landing, one via the main stairs and the other via the door opposite this room. I should also remind you, while on the subject of housekeeping arrangements, to make sure you don't have your mobile phones switched on. Also, do take plenty of photos afterwards, but please don't take any during the meeting for worship.

Children are very welcome to stay in the meeting room, but if they become restless and need a change of scene, the room across the landing is available for you to use, with toys and colouring materials. You are welcome to bring children back in later on if you like.

The meeting for worship for marriage will last about an hour, during which time we will uphold Dougal and Geraint in silent worship. We will settle into silence and then, when they are ready, Dougal and Geraint will take each other by the hand and make their

marriage declarations to each other. At that point, they will be married. They and their two witnesses will then sign the Quaker marriage certificate.

After this, anybody present may offer ministry, and as is the custom in a Quaker meeting for worship, a period of silence should be left after each ministry to allow for reflection. If you are moved to minister, please stand and speak clearly.

Towards the end of the meeting for worship, I will read aloud the Quaker marriage certificate.

Our elders, Sarah and John, will close the meeting for worship by shaking hands, and then after we have all shaken hands with the people sitting next to us, they will invite everyone present to come and sign the Quaker certificate.

Now let us settle into silence as we share this very special occasion of A and B's marriage.

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### **Introduction to wedding**

"For we marry none, it is the Lord's work, we are but witnesses."

George Fox, founder of Quakers, 1669

As we welcome you to this meeting for worship and we witness the marriage of Elsie and Joan, I would like to briefly say what will happen this afternoon. When I have finished speaking we will settle into silent worship. When they feel the time is right, Elsie and Joan will rise and make their declarations to each other. And at that point, they are married. After the declarations, we will settle back into silent worship. If during this time anyone present feels they wish to speak, to minister, then please feel free to rise and speak. It is helpful to leave some space between spoken contributions to allow all to reflect.

The meeting will last around 45 minutes. Towards the end of the meeting, Elsie and Joan, and their two main witnesses will sign the Quaker marriage certificate on the table there. It sets out exactly what has happened. I will read it out, and we will then settle back into worship until the elders close the meeting by shaking hands. After the meeting, everyone who was present when the declarations were made are invited to sign the certificate, both as witnesses to the marriage but also because Quakers believe that marriages take place under the care of the meeting. That is, this local Quaker meeting in which the marriage takes place, but also under that care of everyone who is present in this meeting for worship. We all pledge to support Elsie and Joan in their future life together.

A couple of practicalities. Children are very welcome in Quaker meetings. However, if any parent does wish to take their child out at any point, there is a delightful garden where they can play. Just to say, however, that the babbling of babies does not disturb a meeting at all! What does disturb the meeting for worship is mobile phones (so please make sure yours is off!). Photography too, so we ask that there is no photography or videoing during the meeting. However, at the end – after the elders have shaken hands and before you sign the certificate – Elsie and Joan will stay in place for a while so that photos can be taken.