



Quaker Meetings

Glossary



Meetings glossary

To describe their religious practices, Quakers have developed their own vocabulary, which has changed through time. This glossary aims to describe frequently used terms relating to British Quaker meetings throughout the history of the Religious Society of Friends. References to *Quaker faith & practice*, the book outlining the structure and values of British Quakerism today, have been added where they offer further information.

Allowed meeting

Before 1870 these were known as 'not fully settled meetings'. 'Allowed meeting' was used in the Book of meetings from the 1870s, and the term was formalised at Yearly Meeting in 1891. It was changed to 'recognised meeting' at Yearly Meeting 1967 and became 'local meeting' at Yearly Meeting 2007. A local worshipping group that met at least once a month with the approval of the area meeting, but without the formal sanction of the general meeting. See also 'local meeting'.

Area meeting (AM)

First set up in 1666. Before Yearly Meeting 2007 they were known

as 'monthly meetings'.

A meeting for business comprising members of several local meetings. Area meetings handle membership, property, records, and support their constituent local meetings. They appoint elders and overseers, record membership changes (including marriages and deaths) and manage financial matters. *Quaker faith & practice*, chapter 4: <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/4>

Attender

A person who regularly attends a Quaker meeting but has not taken the necessary steps to become a member.

Quaker faith & practice 11.38: <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/11>

Birthright membership

Formalised at Yearly Meeting 1737. Discontinued at Yearly Meeting 1959. Membership given to those whose parents were Quakers and who had been brought up in the Society. It was initially minuted that the wives and children of anyone in membership would be considered part of the same area meeting. In 1769 this was altered so that if either parent was in membership their children would also have a right to membership, provided they were educated

in the Society and both parents were in membership when they married. Children who did not meet these criteria were to be welcomed by the meeting and the matter of their membership treated on a case-by-case basis. Since 1959 anyone wishing to become a member of the Society has to go through the same process. See also '*membership*'.

Box meeting

Established in 1659.

Amalgamated with Women's Two Weeks Meeting in 1797. Initiated by George Fox, a box meeting was a meeting of female London Quakers with the purpose of helping the poor and needy in the city and its suburbs. Its name comes from the collection box used to gather funds to support this work.

Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM)

Established in 1668. Before Yearly Meeting in 1995 it was known as the Yearly Meeting of Friends in London, or London Yearly Meeting. Britain Yearly Meeting can be used to mean all Quakers living in Britain, officially known as the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, but often abbreviated to Quakers in Britain.

The term Britain Yearly Meeting is also used to refer to the charity and employer that carries out the centrally managed work on behalf of all Quakers in Britain.

It is also the term for the annual gathering of British Quakers, where issues concerning Quakers are discussed and decisions affecting all British Quakers are made. It is often referred to by British Quakers



LSF F072 Gracechurch St Meeting c.1770

simply as Yearly Meeting. Traditionally held in London, since 1905 it has also been held at other venues around the country. Today, Yearly Meeting is normally held during one of the two May bank holiday weekends at Friends House in London. Every third year it is a week-long residential held outside London in July or August.

Scotland General Meeting became part of Britain Yearly Meeting in 1786; Wales Yearly Meeting joined in 1797. Ireland Yearly Meeting is a separate organisation that includes Quakers in Northern Ireland.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 6:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/6>

Certificate

A term for documents given to individual Quakers when they moved between meetings, as evidence of their membership and good standing. Given out by area meetings, those moving permanently would give their certificate to their new area meeting. Travelling ministers would show their certificate to meetings they visited before giving it back to their area meeting on their return.

Clerk

A clerk is a member of a

meeting who is responsible for the administrative functions of meetings for business.

They record the minutes on behalf of the meeting and are responsible for the meeting's correspondence.

Quaker faith & practice 3.12:

<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3>

Convincement

Conversion to Quakerism. A convinced Quaker is one who was not born into a Quaker family or raised a Quaker.

Disownment

When a member of the Religious Society of Friends publicly expresses an opinion or acts in a way that is contrary to the principles of the Society, they might have their membership terminated by their area meeting. In the past, when it was more common than it is now, this was known as disownment.

Reasons for disownment have included bankruptcy, drinking to excess, joining the military, and marrying in a non-Quaker ceremony. First, a visit is made to the offending person to discuss the issue. Then, if deemed appropriate, their membership is revoked. The person can continue to attend meetings for worship if they wish, and

reinstatement of membership is possible.

Quaker faith & practice 11.28:

<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/11>

Elder

A member of a meeting with responsibility for the spiritual life of that meeting. Elders are responsible for the running of meetings, including weddings and funerals, and for encouraging helpful ministry. Until Yearly Meeting 1876 the role of elder was held for life, unless the area meeting decided otherwise, but now it is held for three-year periods.

Quaker faith & practice 12.05:

<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/12>

Epistle

An advisory letter, usually sent to and/or from a group of people. The term is often used to mean letters sent from one Yearly Meeting to another, or from a Yearly Meeting to its general and area meetings. Epistles usually contain greetings, state the condition of the meeting sending the epistle, and discuss problems of the sender and of the meeting to which the letter is sent. Epistles may be addressed to a specific meeting, or they may be more general in character and sent to several yearly meetings.

General meeting

First set up in 1660. Before Yearly Meeting 1967 it was known as a 'quarterly meeting'. Since Yearly Meeting 2005 it is no longer part of the administrative structure.

A gathering of Quakers from several area meetings in the same region, usually a county or group of counties. In 1967, as well as being renamed, they were taken out of the decision-making chain and became a forum for debate with no business functions. Since 2005 those that have continued have become either regional gatherings or charities.

The term also refers to the 'responsible body' for a Quaker school, which appoints the school committee or governors and receives the school's annual report and accounts.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 5:

<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/5>

Indulged meeting

A US term denoting a meeting of Quakers who, due to circumstance, are unable to get to any of the regular meetings in their area and are therefore permitted to meet for worship in their location.

Laid down

The term used to denote the

official discontinuation of a meeting.

Local meeting

A local worshipping group, this term replaced preparative meeting, recognised meeting and notified meeting at Yearly Meeting 2007.

Before Yearly Meeting 1967 local meetings were known as 'preparative meetings', 'particular meetings' or 'allowed meetings.' Until 1750 they were called 'settled meetings' or 'not fully settled meetings'.

Quaker faith & practice 4.31:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/4>

London Yearly Meeting – see '*Britain Yearly Meeting*'

Meeting

An arranged period of silent, unprogrammed worship during which anyone may be moved to make a spoken contribution (this usage is short for meeting for worship). It is also used to refer to the worshipping community, just as Anglicans would use 'church' or 'congregation', for example.

Meeting for business

A meeting for decision-making and the administration of church affairs using the Quaker business method, conducted largely in

silence and making decisions in unity as a group. See also '*minutes*'.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 3:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3>

Meeting for clearness

A meeting of a small group of trusted Quakers to help in the harmonious settlement of disputes or to help Friends find a way forward.

Quaker faith & practice 12.22:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/12>

Meeting for Sufferings

Established by Morning Meeting in 1675.

A committee first established to seek redress for the persecution that was being inflicted on Quakers at the time. Meeting for Sufferings was also asked by Yearly Meeting to help with issues such as oaths and tithes, and became the Quaker executive committee. Women have been eligible to serve on Meeting for Sufferings since 1896.

Today, Meeting for Sufferings is the standing representative body entrusted with the care of the business of BYM between Yearly Meetings.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 7:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/7>

Membership

Formalised at Yearly Meeting in 1737.

To be 'in membership' is to be an officially recognised member of the Religious Society of Friends. Until 1737 there was no formal membership process. Declaring oneself a Quaker could result in some negative consequences, so it was assumed that if you did so then you were indeed a Friend. Meetings for business were, however, restricted to approved Friends. Yearly Meeting 1737 began to establish the idea of formal membership, with the process of members from the area meeting visiting prospective members and reporting back to the area meeting first minuted in 1764.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 11:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/11>

Minister

Official lists kept from 1700. Discontinued at Yearly Meeting in 1924.

Quakers in Britain do not support a paid clergy. The different organisational roles of a meeting are shared and rotated among its members. Vocal ministry (see 'ministry') may be given by anyone present at a meeting. In the past it was recognised that some were more moved

to do so, and they became known as 'publick' Friends, also referred to as ministers. Since the 18th century they were recognised by the area meeting as 'acknowledged' or 'recorded' ministers. Official recognition of ministers was discontinued in 1924.

Ministry

Ministry generally refers to an individual's spiritual work or service. In Quaker contexts it usually refers to vocal ministry, when a person is led to stand up and speak during a meeting. *Quaker faith & practice*, chapter 2:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/2>

Minutes

Records of meetings for business, drafted contemporaneously by the clerk of that meeting in response to what they feel the meeting as a whole is saying. Minutes can record past events, give an indication of the nature of the discussion, or state a decision. Once the clerk has drafted a minute, they read it to the meeting, and if it is accepted it goes into the records. *Quaker faith & practice* 3.14:
<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/3>

Mission meeting

Meetings for worship organised by particular meetings and usually connected with adult school work. These meetings often involved hymn singing and prepared addresses, and were not fully recognised by Yearly Meeting.

Monthly meeting – see ‘*area meeting*’

Morning Meeting – see ‘*Second Day Morning Meeting*’

Notified meeting – see ‘*allowed meeting*’ and ‘*local meeting*’

Overseer

A member of a meeting with responsibility for the general welfare of the members and

attenders of that meeting.

Quaker faith & practice 12.05:

<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/12>

Particular meeting

Before 1750 this was known as a ‘settled meeting’. From 1967 it was known as a ‘recognised meeting’, and from 2007 as a ‘local meeting’.

A local worshipping group that meets every week and is officially recognised by the area meeting and the general meeting, but does not hold meetings for business. See also ‘local meeting’.

Preparative meeting

Defined at Yearly Meeting 1794. Since 2007 known as ‘local meeting’.

A local worshipping group that is



LSF F014 Silent Meeting

officially recognised by the area meeting and the general meeting. It holds meetings for business in preparation for the area meeting. See also 'local meeting'.

Quarterly meeting – see '*general meeting*'

Recognised meeting – see '*allowed meeting*' and '*local meeting*'

Second Day Morning Meeting of ministering Friends (morning meeting)

Set up in 1673. From 1727 known as 'Morning Meeting for Ministers and Elders'; laid down in 1901.

Most commonly referred to as 'Morning Meeting'. This is a meeting of ministering Friends based in London with responsibility for issues relating to ministry, controlling Quaker publications and answering anti-Quaker material. Morning Meeting decided in 1673 to collect a complete set of all publications produced by Quakers. It also decided to collect everything written against Quakers, so that they could issue a response promptly. This would come to form the basis of the Library's collections today.

Six Weeks Meeting

Set up in 1671. Since 2017 known as 'London Quakers Property Trust'.

Established in 1671 to offer advice to London meetings when George Fox was away, Six Weeks Meeting evolved to take charge of concerns relating to education, needy Quakers, travelling Friends, and property. Today it functions as the committee responsible for the upkeep and administration of Quaker premises in and around London.

Testimonies

The term used to refer to the core Quaker values of peace, equality, simplicity, truth, and (more recently) sustainability. A testimony, as a shortening of "testimony to the grace of God in the life of _", can also be a memorial to a deceased Friend, akin to a spiritual obituary. This second type of testimony has been written since the 17th century, and in 1931 it was formalised in Church Government as something that can be undertaken by an area meeting and published in Yearly Meeting Proceedings if "likely to be of service to the Society".

Quaker faith & practice 4.27–4.30:

<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/4>

Two Weeks Meeting

Set up in 1655. Women's meeting established in 1659. Men's meeting laid down in 1789. Women's meeting amalgamated with box meeting in 1797.

This was set up as the London meeting for matters of discipline, the recording of births, marriages and deaths, and of the sufferings and the care of the poor. A parallel women's meeting was set up in 1659 to take on the care of the poor. Following the establishment of area meetings, its duties became the overseeing of marriages in the London area, with the women's meeting continuing the care of the poor.

Women's meeting

Established in 1666. First official London Women's Yearly Meeting in 1797. Amalgamated with men's meetings in 1908.

Meetings for business that were parallel to the men's area meetings, general meetings and, later, Yearly Meetings. Women's meetings were established by early Quaker leaders Margaret Fell and George Fox in order to give women greater opportunity to go against social convention and speak on matters of business. The women's meeting had authority over marriages, the moral behaviour of women

in the meeting, and providing charity to the poor and sick. It was subordinate to the men's meeting, however. Women did not have their own official Yearly Meeting until 1784. The idea of separate meetings became less popular towards the end of the 19th century, as it was felt that the business conducted by women's meetings was 'make-work'.

Yearly Meeting

A term used to describe both the annual gathering of Quakers in a country, state or other substantial area, and the body of Quakers that this gathering represents. In the British context Yearly Meeting is used to refer to the annual gathering of Quakers in Britain. See also '*Britain Yearly Meeting*'.

The Library of the Society of Friends

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