



Reparation Working Group

Summary

Document in Advance for Yearly Meeting | July 2026

This is a summary of the Reparation Working Group's report to Yearly Meeting, July 2026. It is not a substitute for the full document, which Friends are encouraged to read in advance of the session.

Who we are and why

The Quakers in Britain Trustees' Reparation Working Group (RWG) was established in autumn 2023, in response to minutes 27 & 33 of Yearly Meeting 2022, to examine British Quakers' historical involvement in enslavement and colonialism, and to consider what reparation requires of us today. The Group will be laid down in December 2027, by which time it will bring recommendations to British Friends.

The RWG comprises six members representing Quaker Central Committees or BYM Trustees, and two Friends from the Black, Brown and People of Colour Friends Fellowship, supported by co-opted specialists and a full-time Reparation Co-ordinator. Since 2023 its work has spanned four workstreams: historical research, networking and listening, theological research, and finance.

What the historical research found

Some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British Quakers enslaved Africans, took land from indigenous peoples to found Quaker colonies in Turtle Island (North America), and governed those colonies from London – including, in West Jersey, apportioning land according to the number of enslaved people who would work it.

Quaker family dynasties – including the **Barrows of Lancaster, the Fretwells of Sheffield and the Cadburys of Birmingham** – built fortunes on profits from this colonial economy. Banks including **Barclays, Lloyds and the Royal Bank of Scotland** trace their founding in part to the same profits, which also helped power the industrial revolution and underpin the comparative prosperity Britain enjoys today.

London Yearly Meeting itself was slow to act: it took over thirty years to respond to a 1689 Germantown petition calling for abolition, and a further thirty-four years before discerning, in 1761, that Friends engaged in enslaving should be disowned – a minute that was, in any case, widely ignored.

Newly discovered founding documents for West Jersey, held in the Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting archive, reveal deeply troubling treatment of the Lenape people, an area requiring further research.

Exploitation did not end with abolition

Quaker chocolate manufacturers Cadbury and Rowntree, while pioneering good working conditions for British staff, did not extend the same standards to their supply chains. Documented evidence spans Rowntree's use of indentured labour in the West Indies (1890s–1934); enslaved-labour conditions on São Tomé cocoa plantations supplying both companies (1886–1909), confirmed by their own agent; uncompetitive joint cocoa-buying in West Africa (1919–1972); and Wilson Rowntree's mass dismissal of Black workers under apartheid in the 1980s. A 2022 Channel 4

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Dispatches investigation found children as young as ten doing hazardous labour within Cadbury's modern supply chain in Ghana.

Separately, the RWG is researching British Quaker support for missions in Kenya, which Kenyan Friends experienced as working alongside colonial power to disrupt their lives and erase cultural identity.

What we heard

Listening to Friends in Africa, the Caribbean and Britain has been central to the RWG's work. Voices from Ghana, South Africa and Kenya describe an enduring 'colonisation of the mind' that still shapes attitudes to culture, education and economics, alongside food import dependency rooted in colonial-era agricultural policy. Voices from Jamaica describe widespread landlessness and insecurity tracing directly to the treatment of the formerly enslaved after manumission, and endemic violence against women and girls rooted in plantation life. Across both regions, reparation is understood as a matter of justice, not charity.

Theological research and the financial workstream

Commissioned post-doctoral research, delivered by Woodbrooke at the end of June 2026, examines the theology used to justify enslavement, the theology of abolition, and the theology of reparation and liberation. The full report and summary will be published on the Quakers in Britain website and discussed at the RWG's conference on 23 October 2026.

On finance, the RWG is working through how best to involve those experiencing the legacies of enslavement and colonisation in recommending a reparation amount and its destination to BYM Trustees, who will in turn bring proposals to a future Yearly Meeting for discernment. The Group considers a careful, community-led process more faithful than a hasty one.

A significant moment

British Quakers are not alone on this journey. In 2026 alone: the United Nations adopted a resolution (25 March, proposed by the President of Ghana) naming the economy of trafficking and enslaving Africans the gravest crime against humanity, with the UK abstaining; the Church of Scotland issued a formal apology (16 May); and Pope Leo XIV issued the most explicit papal admission of institutional Vatican responsibility to date (25 May). The RWG has partnered with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparation and Black Lives Matter UK, and is funding the cataloguing of BYM's archive of overseas work since 1868.

What is being asked of Yearly Meeting

Friends are asked to receive this progress report, to engage with the historical and theological findings, and to hold the RWG in the Light as it continues a long process of discernment. Friends are warmly invited to the RWG's conference, Truth and Repair: Our Quaker Journey Towards Justice, on Friday 23 October 2026 at Friends House and online.

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For the full report, sources and footnotes, see the complete document presented to Yearly Meeting.