

Testimonies

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Yearly Meeting of Quakers in Britain



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Introduction

Testimonies to the Grace of God in lives – an enduring presence

The advice in the current *Quaker faith & practice* at paragraph 4.27 that “a testimony should not be a formal obituary or eulogy, but should record in thankfulness the power of divine grace in human life” is not always easy to carry through.

The following paragraph, 4.28, a minute from the then Hertford Monthly Meeting* of 1780, records “the purpose of a testimony concerning our deceased worthy Friends [is] intended as a memorial, that they have walked as children of the Light, and of the Day, and to excite those who remain to take diligent heed, and to yield to the teachings of the still small voice, that they may follow them as they followed Christ, the great captain of their salvation”. Much of this expresses Friends’ interest in the writing of testimonies today, but how is it carried out?

Historically in Britain the issue of records concerning deceased Friends in the ministry began in the 17th century. “An early record maintained by London YM is now lost but a series of volumes begun in 1740 were maintained until 1872 with retrospective entries copied up from 1719. These volumes are known as ‘Testimonies concerning ministers deceased’. From the 19th century [they] contain minutes from quarterly meetings recording the lives of Friends rather than ministers. From 1861 quarterly meetings were at liberty to prepare a testimony concerning any Friend ‘whose life was marked by conspicuous service to God and the church.’” (Text typed up in Friends House library subject files c.1970).

An early American testimony written around 1690 advises “it is a justice due to the righteous, and a duty upon us, to contribute something to perpetuate the names of such who have left a fragrantcy behind them, and through faith have obtained a good report” (Samuel Jennings’s testimony concerning John Eckley of Philadelphia).

Coming forward to the 20th century, London Yearly Meeting *Church government* of 1931, in use for more than three decades, stated “A Monthly Meeting may issue a testimony concerning the life and service of a deceased member whose life has been marked by devotion to the cause of his Lord and to the service of the Church. The object of such a Testimony is not eulogy, but to preserve a record of Divine Grace in the lives of (wo)men.” This last sentence bears a close similarity to para 4.27 in the current *Quaker faith & practice*. The text goes on to refer to progression of a testimony to yearly meeting “only if it is likely to be of service to the Society”. This is in line with our current practice.

In today’s fast-moving world Friends face a double challenge: to concentrate on the Divine and to write a short but rounded record. The first is not easy as it necessarily relates to our temporal experience; the second is increasingly important if posterity is to hold learning from an inspiring text in an age of complexities, speed and an increasing multiplicity of knowledge and communication. Friends can be long-winded. This puts some off from joining in our business meetings for worship.

A testimony should radiate the Grace of God as shown in the life of the Friend who has passed from this world. It differs from an obituary account of achievements, yet a few milestones in the life of the deceased will serve to illuminate the spiritual gifts bestowed.

Date of birth, date(s) of marriage(s), and date of death describe the setting of time. This is a necessary aid to living Friends. It is also a recognition of the times in which the life is set for posterity, where future Friends can relate the spiritual gifts received to the cultural context of the era. Reference to immediate antecedents can anchor the recall of a name for more distant Friends. Reference to children can demonstrate the enrichment of life.

Recognition of a spiritually lived life and its application characterises the preparation of a testimony. Worship through quiet waiting upon God prayerfully alone or where two or three are gathered together in meeting is the hallmark of a Quaker. This does not deny the devotional or biblical

emphases in other traditions. As seekers after Truth, Friends should be open to new learning as God's revelation continues in the world.

It is against this background that the application of talents, whether within the life of the Society or in witness in the wider world, are described. There is a temptation to link these to a career pattern or an extended voluntary body commitment, and hence border on an obituary. Rather, it is the spiritually inspired application of the talent for good that matters. Examples of the flowering of each talent in the life pattern of the departed Friend can then be quoted. If carefully knit together these convey an image of the whole.

Writing a testimony to the life of a departed Friend may not be easy. How far do we understand the familial and cultural background, the stresses and successes in that life? Did the light shine forth in life? Where we see glimpses of the inner spiritual life, how do these reflect in outward activity?

Were outward concerns truly a reflection of inward Grace? How does economic comfort sit easily with God's Will? Then we come back to what to include, what to leave out and how to outwardly reflect a spiritually inspired life to future generations.

Not far distant may be the expectations of relatives of the deceased. When a close relative died I had anticipated a prepared obituary in *The Friend* but instead I read a note from one who had only known her in her last years. I know a Friend now who feels hurt that no testimony was written around her partner who died some years ago. On another occasion a Friend who was to die shortly afterwards made plain that he did not want a testimony written to his life. It is difficult to know the aspirations of family members, and particularly so when anxiety and grief intrude. With a little passage of time, such aspirations, if known, should not cloud the consideration within monthly meeting of how appropriately to remember a Friend. Such an interlude of perhaps a few months may help the meeting also in its discernment as to whether to prepare a testimony to the Grace of God in a life. It is the Light shining in life that matters.

That meetings might hold a short record of the lives of members is commendable. That these should be developed into testimonies is not necessarily the right use of time for the living. It is difficult to distinguish between the Martha and the Mary, and neither should we judge. Meetings need prayerful thought before committing the strengths of a life to a Quaker testimony.

John Melling, Assistant Clerk to General Meeting for Scotland

As endorsed by General Meeting for Scotland by its minute 15 of 11 September 2004.

Approved by Meeting for Sufferings by minute 6 of 2 December 2006.

*Monthly meetings are now known as area meetings.

David Blamires

4 May 1936 – 9 November 2022

David Malcolm Blamires was born on 4 May 1936 into a Quaker family in a small village near Cleckheaton in the West Riding of Yorkshire. With his elder brother John he worshipped at Scholes meeting house, where his father was an elder, and often remembered how he was impressed by the ministry in this intimate setting, as well as taking part in Quaker young people's activities at Great Ayton, Yealand, summer school and further afield.

David won a scholarship to Cambridge, where he read Modern Languages at Christ's College. This was a life-changing experience for a boy from a working-class background: 'like technicolour after a youth in black and white', as he later said. He became a member of the Student Christian Movement, and was later involved with a High Anglican circle, the Epiphany Philosophers, to the extent that in 1960 he was baptised and confirmed into the Church of England, although he never intended to switch from Quakerism. He was also active with Cambridge meeting and Cambridge Young Friends, and in the circle of young Friends around Damaris and Frederick Parker-Rhodes and Anna Bidder. During his five and a half years in Cambridge he was a member of Young Friends Central Committee, becoming international secretary, and wrote for Young Quaker magazine. Throughout his life David's rootedness in the Quaker testimonies permeated his worship, his daily life and his extensive Quaker writings.

School and university trips to France and Germany allowed David not only to attend many Quaker and ecumenical gatherings but to talk to individuals and to gain personal knowledge of the experiences of German people and their attitudes to the war and European politics. Travelling to both West and East Germany, at a time when the contacts and movements of many Germans were tightly controlled, helped him to see both positive and negative aspects of East German society. He also visited the Soviet Union with a small Quaker party in 1959.

After a doctorate in medieval German literature, David came to Manchester in 1960 as a lecturer in German at Manchester University. He was to work in the same department, live in the same house and worship in the same area meeting for the rest of his life. David was emphatically not a rolling stone.

In his large house in Withington David set up a commune, inspired by the Epiphany Philosophers, but this foundered after a few years when it reached the point where its members were said to be communicating with each other only through their solicitors. He continued to take lodgers, often Quakers temporarily in need of a home, until the rooms were overwhelmed by the rising tide of books and papers. For many years the house was without a proper modern kitchen or central heating, and its state was an increasing source of worry to David's friends, perhaps more to them than it was to him.

David loved teaching, refused to take early retirement and eventually retired in 2001 as Emeritus Professor of German. Apart from medieval German literature, on which he published a number of books, David's research interests ranged widely. He was largely responsible for the widening of interest in the twentieth-century Anglo-Welsh painter and poet David Jones, writing the first book on him (1971) and setting up the David Jones Society.

An otherwise modest lifestyle – he had no time for cars, pets, sports or television – allowed David to indulge his lifelong bibliophilia. Among much else he amassed important collections of alphabet books ('Q was a Quaker who would not bow down') and historical English and German fairy tales and children's books, on which he was also an internationally recognised authority. Towards the end of his life, he donated his diaries and the best of his art collection and enormous library to the Whitworth Gallery and the Manchester University Library, among other institutions.

After a short period at Wythenshawe (now South Manchester) meeting David moved to Mount Street (now Central Manchester) meeting, where he continued to worship, in his last years intermittently and in a wheelchair, until a fortnight before he died. In business meetings his calm forthrightness,

and his ability to resolve difficult issues with common sense contributions at the right moment, won him great respect. He was a veteran of many offices, groups and committees not just locally but at a national and international level. These included the World Relations Committee, Constitution Review Committee, Library Committee, Literature Committee, Central Committee of Home Service, Woodbrooke Council and Meeting for Sufferings. For twenty years he was editor of *The Friends Quarterly* (1987–2008). David travelled a good deal, and found friends, lovers and Quaker contacts in Germany, Finland and elsewhere in Europe as well as in Canada, the United States, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. He gave long service to the Friends World Committee for Consultation and attended yearly meetings and conferences in many countries.

David's most distinctive contribution to Quaker history began earlier in his life. After his university days he became aware that he was gay, and in his early days in Manchester he was a volunteer on a gay telephone counselling line, as well as trying to set up a gay group for university staff. Male homosexuality was illegal in England until David was thirty, and was pervaded by fear, ostracism, concealment and stigma, even for many years after partial decriminalisation in 1967. Such attitudes militated against understanding and self-acceptance, and inhibited the formation of loving relationships. Public discussions of homosexuality were couched in legal or medical terms as something to be cured, punished, or at best pitied. Traditional oppressive interpretations of Scripture remained paramount, and the attitude was invariably one of 'us and them'. This latter was still a feature of *Towards a Quaker view of sex* (1963), a controversial and widely discussed short book unofficially published by a group of Friends, which contained a substantial and less censorious discussion of homosexuality. This was a pivotal moment in the approach to understanding of sexual issues among British churches and in society more generally.

Ignorance, prejudice or hostility continued among some Friends but for many there was an absence of strong views resulting from lack of personal acquaintance with gay people and their lives. This began to change in 1973 with the publication, following an earlier article by him in *The Friend*, of

David's *Homosexuality from the inside*. Here for the first time an openly gay man was giving a calm and reasoned response to the stereotypes. He described the emotional lives of ordinary women and men who happened to be gay, and the difficulties they encountered in living fulfilling lives in the face of much public hostility. This short book, together with the founding at about the same time of the Friends Homosexual Fellowship (now Quaker Rainbow) by David and others, brought much-needed help and support to many gay people in and around the Society of Friends.

Although he was supported by others, David's book was a brave and daring demonstration of integrity, and he was more than any other single individual responsible for the Society of Friends coming to understand and accept gay people long before other British churches did – though the process was a slow one which some Friends found challenging. It is thanks to David's openness and advocacy, and that of others who followed and learned from him, that gay relationships are no longer an issue among Friends in most (though still not all) parts of the world. David was one of ten Friends who wrote *This we can say: talking honestly about sex* (1995), an unofficial publication intended to replace the outdated *Towards a Quaker view of sex*. He supported Susan Hartshorne's long-held concern that eventually led to Quakers' espousal of equal marriage in 2009 – at the time a pioneering step. In 2012 he told the story of his activism in another short book, *Pushing at the frontiers of change: a memoir of Quaker involvement with homosexuality*. David wrote that sexuality was perhaps the deepest mystery of life, and welcomed the opportunities for further service afforded by independence and lack of family commitments.

Among all this David found time for books, art, music, cooking, exploring towns and the countryside, holidays, friendship and fun, while welcoming many visitors to his increasingly dilapidated home. He wrote clever and amusing alphabet poems, which he often circulated at Christmas, and supported students and younger Friends in need, including the textile artist Mark Rhodes, who was David's last partner. He never became comfortable with computers, email and mobile phones, and in later years his travels and Quaker activities were reduced by increasing deafness, which he found

difficult to cope with. In his last years he developed dementia, and, just before the Covid pandemic started, moved into a care home near his house in Withington. Here he continued to write poetry and his diary and to seek silence and solitude, and welcomed visitors until shortly before he died on 9 November 2022. David was truly a Friend who made his life speak, and he will be greatly missed.

Signed on behalf of Manchester & Warrington Area Meeting

Held 2 December 2025

Margaret Everitt, Clerk

Peter Capewell

29 March 1934 – 24 August 2025

Peter was one of the members of Oakham Meeting who were involved in the resumption of Oakham as a recognised meeting in the early 1980s, along with Gerald and Joan Johnson. He wrote of his knowledge of our history in the area. He was well versed in the history and practices of Friends, in particular, not handling money in the meeting house. Peter and his wife Doreen thus became founder members of our modern meeting which has flourished ever since.

He was determined to keep the meeting going: he cleaned the meeting house, welcomed newcomers and gave lifts to bring people in. He served as treasurer for many years with his characteristic attention to detail and his meticulous explanation of his figures. His practical advice to making friends when new to meeting was to help with the washing up – certain to generate conversation!

Peter and Doreen were a constant source of reassurance and certainty in Meeting: his ministry was always considered, a product of his extensive reading and included comments on current affairs of concern. They were both supportive of and concerned for the welfare of Friends, keeping a record of attenders.

Peter had been a maths teacher in Melton for some 30 years and did retain an air of authority in his manner, well-meant and gently delivered in his ministry.

He was a strong supporter of Amnesty International, often expressing deep concern for the prisoners of conscience among others. He gave his time as a volunteer driver for about 30 years.

A man of kindness and dedication with a keen eye for detail, much missed and valued.

Signed on behalf of Leicester Area Meeting
Held 25 January 2026
David Lewis, Clerk

Bill (William Bartlett) Evans

6 June 1934 – 24 September 2025

Born on 6th June 1934 into a Quaker family, Bill was accepted as a child member when he was two weeks old. Living in High Wycombe until 1947, he was part of the small Meeting there. He was sent to board at Sibford Friends' School when he was ten, which he was not entirely happy with. Nevertheless, he got on well, his strong non-conformist and individualist manner being accepted.

His strong will carried on throughout his life. An early example of this was that when he was fourteen he decided to cycle to Edinburgh to attend Junior Yearly Meeting, without telling his parents. The weather was bad and he had several "adventures", including losing some of his possessions, but he completed the journey and made a written report of the meeting. His whole life was to continue to be a journey seeking spirit and faith in everyday life.

Whilst he was at Sibford, his parents moved to Croydon. He became part of the large Croydon Meeting, which had many seasoned Friends. He became an active member and said that this was when he "grew up" in Quakerism.

Bill left Sibford when he was just fifteen, in 1949, completing his schooling locally in south London. At this time he had a strong conviction that the world should work as hard for peace as it had for war. The terms of his exemption from National Service required him to do practical social work. When he was eighteen he became involved in the Quaker work camp movement, and then with International Voluntary Service, founded by the Swiss Quaker and pacifist Pierre Ceresole. He volunteered in Algeria and the Netherlands, seeing work camps as a way to foster peace and reconciliation.

At one of these work camps he met his future wife, Joy. Soon they began a remarkable marriage which was to last for nearly seventy years, until Joy's death in 2024.

Bill and Joy's Croydon home was a hub of activity, people often staying with

them. It was a meeting place for local branches of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), International Voluntary Service (IVS) and the Labour Party. Bill was a member of the organising committee of CND and involved in the first two Aldermaston marches. He remained involved for many years.

Their incredible marriage was also a very fruitful one – they raised seven of their own children and fostered between eighty and ninety other needy children.

In his early life, Bill remained uncertain about his work direction. Initially he worked in education administration in Inner London. He studied for a degree, changed jobs and still felt unsettled. After a period of self-doubt and ill health, with Joy looking after him, they decided to move to Leamington in 1979 with Bill working as Chief Administrative Officer at Warwickshire College.

At this time Warwick meeting house was used by a small and elderly group of Friends. The historic meeting house, garden with Quaker burial site and two storey building on the High Street, which was used as a commercial office, was in need of renovation and modernisation. Bill played a vital role in the redevelopment of the site to make it into a community centre, including a cafe for town users and providing better facilities for an expanding Quaker Meeting. This now included provision for children and young people, which Bill saw as centrally important to the Meeting.

In the late 1980s Bill took early retirement. Seeking new direction, he spent a term at Woodbrooke, studying lives of early Friends. He increased his Quaker involvement within the Area and Yearly Meetings, serving for 8 years on Meeting for Sufferings. He was closely involved with the West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project and the One World Link which aimed to promote friendship through exchanges of people, knowledge and understanding between Warwick/Leamington and Bo in Sierra Leone. In 1991 he represented Britain Yearly Meeting at the World Gathering of Friends in Honduras. This led to the setting up of the Quaker Bolivia Link. He was

deeply involved with the Labour Party, both as an activist and a financial contributor, including roles as local councillor, then Mayor of Leamington, Chair of Planning Committee and Chair of Warwick District Council. While he was mayor, he visited Bo against the advice of the British Foreign Office, after 10 years of war, and he was greeted enthusiastically. He kept a very close eye on the international political situation all his life.

He did not neglect his work with Warwick Local Meeting. He took on at various times the roles of clerk, treasurer and convenor of the Premises and Finance committee, overseeing the engagement of a residential warden.

The meeting thrived and is today a lively and active multi-generational Quaker community that Bill helped to form.

Towards the end of his life, Bill's health deteriorated. He and Joy first moved to a flat, with extra support, and then to a residential home, where Joy died before him. He did not adapt easily to the limitations of ageing and not being able to be a person of action. With untiring family support, he continued to go to local parks and on long drives, latterly with a powered wheelchair. His frustrations with his personal limitations sometimes led to heightened exchanges with others; a combination of challenge and gentle humour was vital at times to take the heat out of the situation.

His difficult final years in no way detract from his towering achievements in life, with his and Joy's amazing family, with Quakers, and with promoting Quaker values in the political sphere and at international level. His legacy will be long-standing.

Signed on behalf of Central England Area Meeting
Held 31 May 2026
Cathy Khurana, Clerk

Barbara Mary Groombridge née Lee

29 December 1937 – 06 February 2024

Barbara was born on 29 December 1937 in London to Marjorie (née Collet-Brown) and Percy Lee, then living in Croydon, the third of four siblings. Her father intermittently gave up his work as a teacher when his mental health deteriorated, and the family moved in 1940 to Wylands, an isolated bungalow with land but no utilities such as water and electricity, situated near North Tawton in Devon, where Barbara had many fond memories of playing in the adjacent fields. She attended the local primary school, but, when the time came for her to move to a secondary school, there was no school within daily travelling distance from their very isolated home, so she followed her older sister to Sidcot, a Quaker boarding school in Somerset. However, unlike her sister who enjoyed being at Sidcot, Barbara hated it as she was very shy and homesick. Despite this, she made what became a lifelong friendship with Mary Brown, who lived in Stroud and ultimately attended Barbara's funeral.

Having achieved A-Level distinctions in English and in three foreign languages, Barbara left school and spent three months working at a children's home in Germany; this came about through a Quaker contact of her mother's, as a result of Quaker aid work in Germany in the post-war years. Following a shorthand and typing course Barbara read German at University College London. During the 1957-58 academic year she was presented with the Heimann Medal, awarded for 'The Highest Proficiency in German' at University College London. She took to life in London, enjoying the jazz clubs and learning to jive. She spent a year in Marburg, studying with German students, feeling at a disadvantage, as German was their first language, but managing to hold her own. During this time she lost the sight of her left eye and was advised to stop studying in order to rest the eye but she refused, sat her finals and was awarded a First.

Barbara then became pregnant; she decided to keep her son Nick, a courageous decision at that time, but to which both parents gave full support. She then faced the difficulty of finding work. She was fortunate

to find a job running a small private school in North Tawton, despite having no teacher training or experience, which meant that she could live in with Nick. Later she took a job at a technical college in Wednesbury, teaching German to apprentices in Black Country factories, so that they could deal with continental customers once the UK joined the Common Market. It was during this time that Barbara lost the sight of her right eye for six weeks; Nick stayed with her parents until her sight partially returned and she was able to resume teaching. She never regained full sight in her right eye.

She met Mike in Devon and in 1965 they married at Walsall Registry Office, moving later into a house in Bernard Street. Her other two sons David and Paul were born in that house, and she and Mike lived there for the remainder of her life. Barbara was always a great advocate for Walsall, and she loved their house and their street. She came to know almost all the residents of Bernard Street in 1977 when collecting money for the street party to celebrate Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee.

Barbara resumed teaching once all three boys were at school, this time lecturing at Walsall Technical College in subjects such as German and English as a Foreign Language. She worked there part-time for almost thirty years, and made many close friends at the college. Before retiring, she survived cancer on two occasions.

Barbara was a keen crossworder and did the Guardian crossword regularly. She won the Guardian crossword prize on 16 January 1999; although she continued to complete the crossword frequently she never submitted her answers again, believing that it would give other people a better chance of winning.

For some years after they retired, she and Mike helped to run an occasional stall in the town's market, collecting and selling pre-loved donated items to raise funds for charities supported by Walsall Meeting. She greatly enjoyed this. She also very much enjoyed helping with the Central England Quakers (CEQ) parcel-packing each Christmas, providing food parcels for families of prisoners.

Barbara's mother was a lifelong Quaker, as was Barbara. Whilst living at

Wylands their nearest meeting was in Exeter, which was too far to attend regularly, so Marjorie started a meeting in Okehampton, where she and Barbara worshipped. Barbara retained her Quaker faith for the remainder of her life, becoming a very well respected and much-loved member of both Walsall Meeting and Central England Area Meeting. In periods when Walsall Meeting was very small (in the 1970s and 80s) she would sometimes be the only worshipper at weekly meeting. As well as taking on a variety of roles such as treasurer (for 40 years) at Walsall Meeting, Barbara served on several area meeting committees and as a CEQ Trustee, including being clerk to the trustees for some years, serving at the time of her death as clerk to the outreach and communications committee, attending via Zoom due to her limited mobility.

Barbara is probably best remembered for the love and support she gave to individual Friends. During times of difficulty, or when taking on new roles, many Friends received suitably supportive cards from her. She loved travelling by public transport as this gave her the opportunity to talk to people; her son David said of her that she could begin a conversation in an empty room. She loved her growing family, and cared about all those around her and, despite the infirmities she experienced in her later years, about which we never heard her complain, she always had time to listen.

Over the years Barbara ministered a number of times about the need to have hope. She spoke about her maternal grandmother's simple faith which appealed to her. She was the only one of the siblings who remained a Quaker. She liked the fact that Quakers can make up their own minds and don't have to subscribe to a creed and that their faith can change with them. She spoke about not believing in a personal God but in a spirit. However, she freely admitted that "when the chips were down" she prayed to a personal God and couldn't understand how others wouldn't do that, as it was such a comfort to her and kept her going. She said there are no atheists on a sinking ship. She is much missed by Walsall and Area Meeting Friends.

Signed on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Held 28 March 2026

Rae Ritchie and Paula Button, Clerk

Hilary Ruth Ludlow

22 July 1946 – 12 December 2024

Cause me to hear thy loving kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

Psalm 143:8

Hilary took great solace in these words, referring to them daily and asking for them to be shared at her memorial meeting at Oakham Meeting House on 17th January 2025. A birthright Friend to her mother, Jean Storrow, Hilary's father, James, was known to say that he 'guessed' he too was a Quaker. It seems likely, then, that Hilary's quiet Yorkshire wisdom was born, not only of her life's experiences, but also from her heritage.

As an adult, Hilary spent her married life in Leicestershire and Rutland, where she attended Oakham Local Meeting for over 40 years. As well as raising her three children – Julian, Elizabeth and Stephen – Hilary was an active member in both Oakham and Leicester Area Meeting. She served in a number of roles, including clerk, elder and trustee. As clerk to the trustees for many years, Hilary understood the complexities of the issues at hand: she was unfailingly kind in her comments and noted failings and problems without judgement. Hilary's careful, thorough, and considerate service was an inspiration to those who served with her and remains so to those who follow.

An integral part of Oakham Meeting, Hilary oversaw the major renovation of the Oakham Meeting House in 2014. Where others may have felt overwhelmed by the scale of the project, which restored the 18th century building back to its original status, Hilary found it 'exciting'. Undaunted by the challenges of bureaucracy involved, she sourced external funding to the extent that most of the costs were met by various grants and donations. Hilary's determination, and success, meant that only a modest contribution

was needed from Leicester Area Meeting reserves. When faced with the smaller, but not insignificant, challenge of rebuilding the garden wall of the Meeting House in 2024, Hilary once again stepped in to expedite and manage the project.

Preservation was no doubt one of Hilary's strengths. She followed her Masters in Geology at Lancaster University with a profession in Ecological Consultancy, running her own business for over 20 years. A highly gifted landscape scientist, Hilary was a member of both the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and the Landscape Institute, and undertook a diverse range of assignments. Hilary's love of nature was present from her early years – notably remembered by a friend who went with her to the Grand Canyon during their late teens, and thought Hilary had fallen over the cliff face, only to find her on her hands and knees examining the rocks. This enthusiasm continued, being passed on to her children and grandchildren, as well as to friends who joined her for gardening and dog walks.

As a Quaker, there is no doubt that Hilary lived her life adventurously. With familial ties to North Yorkshire and Sweden, Hilary inherited her ship captain great-grandfather's love of the sea and sailing, learning to sail during her childhood near Ipswich and returning to her passion into her later years on Rutland Water and sailing trips across the world. Most recently, she took lessons to join her grandchildren paddleboarding, remaining with them in spirit as they embark on new adventures. In time they hope to visit Bhutan – a trip Hilary had been looking forward to in the spring following her passing.

Hilary's joyful determination to get as much out of life as she could, was seen even more so during her final eight years at Burley, a small hamlet just outside Oakham. During her time there she left her influence in her garden, and returned to her hobby as a flautist, joining friends for duets with piano, and even trombone. Hilary enjoyed classical concerts but also had an all-embracing innocent acceptance which made her an enthusiast of children's films and science fiction. She had hidden strengths in Italian, not only being an avid reader in English, but also reading in Italian. Despite her

proficiency she refused to speak it, even in Italy!

With her 'things will get done' attitude and remarkable enthusiasm for life, Hilary refused to be downhearted, even in the face of death. As someone who hated to be a bother, she followed *Advices and queries*: 'accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully'. A tower of strength, Hilary lived with bravery and kindness, reminding family and friends that, whatever life may give you, 'love is the most important thing'.

Signed on behalf of Leicester Area Meeting

Held 22 November 2025

David Lewis, Co-Clerk

Dorothy Sheila Parry

12 April 1930 – 13 March 2025

Dorothy was a member of Central England Meeting and a much loved friend at Warwick Local Meeting.

Dorothy was brought up in Coventry and after grammar school she attended Royal Holloway College, graduating in history. She became a history teacher and married a fellow teacher, Roy Parry, in 1970. Sadly Roy developed cancer and died after only 4 years of marriage. During the time of her marriage Dorothy re-trained as a librarian and spent the rest of her working life in that occupation.

Dorothy was devastated by Roy's death and used to spend time sitting quietly in the garden of the Warwick Meeting House. After discussing Quakerism with a respected colleague, she decided to find out who and what was inside the building. She joined the Society of Friends in the early 1990s and became an elder in 1994 and after that an overseer, assistant clerk, then became clerk in 2000. With another friend she organised regular study groups. Also she was involved with Churches Together in Warwick and represented Quakers in the local multi-faith forum.

She researched the history of Warwick Meeting House, building up an excellent collection of documents covering the history of our meeting and meeting house since 1671 including George Fox's visits to Warwick. This archive is now on our website.

During the 1990s Warwick Meeting had a project to extend the premises and build and run a community cafe for the people of the town, as at that time there were few places where people could meet. Dorothy was very involved in setting up and running the café and served on the café committee until 2013. She would tell stories about its early days and always said it was the best thing Warwick Meeting had done.

Dorothy really cared about others and helped, influenced and had an impact on many, many people, both at meeting and locally in Warwick. She loved

children and was always interested in their welfare and helped wherever she could, right up until her death. When newcomers came to meeting, she would talk to them and was always friendly and interested in what they had to say. She was open minded about spirituality so was able to relate to non theists as well as more traditional believers. She was empathetic and sensitive to people's needs, well-read and intelligent, and loved classical music. She had strongly held views on a variety of subjects, especially regarding social justice and politics, and had a great sense of humour and fun, so if you went to see Dorothy you always came away uplifted. Despite the sadness in her life, she "walked cheerfully over the world, answering that of god in every one".

Throughout her life Dorothy was a role model, kind and generous with her time and her possessions. When her health failed and she had to move to a care home she wanted her belongings to go to whoever would appreciate them and asked for nothing in return. She befriended the staff at the home and was loved by them. By the end of her life, she had no living relatives and Quakers were her family. But she was family to the meeting too, well-loved and a pattern and example to us all.

Signed on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Held 26 February 2026

Rae Ritchie and Paula Button, Co-Clerks

Kevin Piper

24 August 1959 – 28 July 2025

Kevin Piper developed an interest in Quakers after attending Labour Party meetings in the premises of Aylesbury Quakers. He saw the sign for the meeting for worship and he and Joseph Irwin, who was at the same meeting, decided to attend the meeting for worship on the next Sunday. From that start he began to learn about Quakers and their values. Through this he felt that he had been Quaker all his life. His experience and commitment show that to be true.

Kevin's father was in the RAF and so his early life involved much moving and consequential disturbance. He worked for BT (British Telecom) and spent time in the Middle East converting their systems. Kevin and his family (wife Rachel and children) moved to Aylesbury before his period of work in the Middle East and on his retirement in 2004 he became active locally.

After the initial attending the meeting for worship he did a lot of inquiring about Friends and he became a member of Chilterns Area Meeting in 2017.

Kevin was a great help to his local meeting at Aylesbury. One of his most outstanding characteristics was his generosity of spirit, his willingness to give his time to causes that benefitted others. Apart from attending meeting for worship and occasionally ministering, he took charge of the local finances as treasurer/collector, he helped set up the email account and Zoom technology, he led some sharing and learning sessions and he publicised Aylesbury Meeting in the local community by his witness (on one occasion through laying a wreath of white poppies at the Remembrance Sunday service in the market square).

Listing his other involvements demonstrates how the Testimonies are reflected in his life.

- He set up a food bank in Aylesbury between Methodists, Catholics and Quakers in the Methodist Chapel. This then developed into the larger one of which he was the chair of trustees.

- He was a staunch anti-nuclear campaigner and attended Greenham Common and other settings in witness.
- He was a follower of the Levellers (a group developed during the same socially disruptive times as Quakers in the 17th century) and attended the annual Burford celebration.
- He regularly demonstrated at the annual arms fair in London.
- Kevin became a trustee and treasurer of Escaping Victimhood, a Quaker Recognised Body. As a trustee he worked with sensitivity and compassion to ensure the charity survived times of great uncertainty. Through his commitment he ensured that the charity, working with families bereaved by homicide, was able to continue and be sustained.

Kevin became a trustee of Chiltern Area Quaker Meeting in 2018 and clerk of Trustees in 2022.

His work with trustees was acknowledged by all as being spiritually led with effectiveness and commitment to maintaining the complexity of business with a balance of sensitive insight and experience. Trustees had a considerable burden of legacies for which to discern effective outcomes. Kevin helped steer this work with sensitivity and efficiency. Working closely with trustees he ensured that the difficult issues were considered through discernment.

Even when very ill Kevin maintained his commitment to the causes within which he had responsibilities. He ensured that the work could continue when he knew he was dying through his illness.

The testimonies reflected in his life through the grace of God are equality, peace and community. We give thanks for his life of service.

Signed on behalf of Chilterns Area Meeting

Held 29 March 2026

Catriona Troth, Clerk

Penelope Putz

19 February 1930 – 10 November 2025

Penelope Fox was born in 1930 in a Tudor manor house in Somerset which was the centre of a working farm. As a growing child, she participated in the life of the farm: shearing and stacking sheaves of oats and wheat.

Her parents, active in politics, in the life of their community and the wider world, began taking in Jewish refugees in the late 1930s. Penelope remembered watching a Jewish refugee shave as he said, “I wish I were dead.”

She would be exposed to more of the world when her mother, a Quaker descended from generations of active Quakers, became the local billeting officer for children being evacuated from London and other cities across the UK. Some children who could not be easily placed came to live with Penelope’s family. She noted much later, her eyes twinkling, “I was brought up in a children’s home.”

The squash court would be turned into a living area for twenty evacuees with a total of more than forty children residing on the farm through the war years. Conscientious objectors trained at Spiceland would come to help with the rearing of the children. Wherever her fight against injustice and her solidarity was born, it certainly continued to animate her life into one of shared responsibility and fellow feeling.

At sixteen, when Penelope went to the Mount School in York, at the end of term she intrepidly took the train down to the south-west, stopping in London to attend the theatre alone ‘sitting in the gods’ before nipping out to Jordans, half an hour from London, to stay with her grandmother before continuing her journey down to Taunton. She did not need to be advised to live adventurously. Supporting theatre and acting would enrich the rest of her days.

At the Mount school, her form teacher expected them to read *The Manchester Guardian*. A happy coincidence, as she would marry Jim Putz at Oxford, another Quaker whose father was a sub-editor at that same paper. Perhaps the gifts of Penelope’s passion and profound work ethic already

suggested that decades later, a stream of letters would be written to The Guardian including Penelope's re-working of 'Land of Hope and Glory' with more equitable lyrics.

Her awareness of the needs of others and her sense of the larger world resulted in her studying history at St Hugh's, Oxford, where she met Jim within the first weeks of her studies at dinner given by Friends. Their life together would be enlivened by a sense of Quaker concern, vitality, joy, and witness and they travelled the world with purpose and in Friendship. While they were in South Africa, they went to a meeting of the Truth and Reconciliation committee examining the army. On other occasions they arranged tours in Syria, Libya and Crimea, all now troubled areas. They also went on an intensive study course in Palestine, meeting many Israeli and Palestinian groups working for peace and giving talks across South Devon about their experiences on their return. They visited Quaker Meetings in ten different countries round the world on their travels. She had the chance to swim on the Great Barrier Reef when it was still undamaged.

Their travels in Palestine with the Israeli Committee against House Demolition resulted in her lifelong passion for the rights of Palestinians. As a friend noted six months before Penelope's death, as she was zipping across town in her buggy to demonstrate for Peace in Gaza, she called out: "Friend, you're going the wrong way. The vigil is this way!"

Even today, a pair of very old wooden skis sit outside their house holding a birthday badge which reads 90, along with a badge supporting Palestinians. In the window, next to the skis sits her hand-drawn sign: "Cut Fossil Fuels".

Penelope was an advocate and she was active. She skied until her 88th year. She was a walker, a swimmer and water skier, actor, singer... amongst countless other activities.

Her jobs, alongside raising three children with Jim, required considerable organisation. While working with the Conservation Society in the mid-1960s, she was aware of the world's resources running out, as well as the challenges of over population. In her forties, she retrained both as a social worker and

a counsellor. She advocated for people with learning differences so that they might live in the community. She fought their corners in countless ways including going to court with them. When she was required to retire, she began working for Cruse Bereavement Support. During her whole life Penelope was a very active member of Exeter Local Meeting and Devon Area Meeting; she was a flame burning brightly, as a Friend noted, “Few words can describe what you gave to the meeting and to the benefit of our world.”

One of her consummate gifts was to do what needed to be done. She could recycle clothes in her wardrobe while presenting herself elegantly at a political rally or vigil or a party.

She lobbied the County Council to divest from fossil fuels in their pension funds; she reminded her local counsellor with great emphasis, that there would be no world, if we did not attend to the climate crisis.

It is inevitable that much will be left out of this testimony because Penelope lived an extraordinary life whose legacy continues to run through her family engaged in Quaker work.

In Penelope’s last ministry in meeting for worship, a day before she died, she said: the manifestations of war are many. She spoke of friendships formed and terrible loss of children and innocents. She looked with an acute eye at our world and managed to walk cheerfully. When her legs could not carry her, she propelled herself to a lecture on the *Four Quartets* in the pouring rain on her red buggy, concerned that she was a few minutes late. Small wonder, since she was descended from women who threw off their skirts and climbed the Matterhorn.

Always alive to beauty and service and sharing, in the last year of her life, in an impromptu moment after meeting, she invited everyone to come to her garden for tea and to see the azaleas in bloom. Throughout her over seventy years in Exeter Meeting, she and Jim hosted hundreds in their homes, sending Friends home with punnets of berries and flowers.

Their generosity never flagged; it was and is a gift to many.

We were graced by her spirit, as a Friend recalled “She was a creative wind that blew with an inexhaustible zest for life....”.

Signed on behalf of Devon Area Meeting

Held 16 May 2026

Barbara Sharrock, Clerk

Greta Sealey

18 October 1933 – 31 May 2024

Then the Lord reached out and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to uproot and tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Jeremiah 1:9-10

As modern Quakers we tend to think of ourselves as practical mystics, but early Friends may have seen themselves more in the prophetic tradition, in the line of the prophets. Greta was part of that prophetic tradition. Though at times she seemed to want to uproot or tear down, she was indeed fearless or prophetic in challenging conventional thinking and in wanting to build up or plant. This was seen in her challenging the name of ‘overseer’, as used for those Friends concerned with pastoral care. Many years before this matter was considered at Yearly Meeting, she asked or demanded that we consider the link between the name overseer and the practice of slavery.

Like Margaret Fell’s plaintiff cry to the Lord ‘We are all thieves, we are all thieves, we have taken the Scriptures in words and know nothing of them in ourselves’, Greta would say we had taken the words of early Quakers and challenged us as to whether we knew for ourselves the truth they held and, if we did, could we express it in our own words.

One Friend recalls how she was led into working with refugees following Greta’s fiery query in 2015: ‘Do you know that refugees are drowning in the Mediterranean?’

Greta was a disrupter in the way Jesus was. She challenged us not to engage in group think but to seek more deeply for the truths we could own. In this way, she was a voice for deep integrity within our meeting and our faith tradition.

Her prophetic voice was not the only gift Greta offered in service to the

world and to meeting. Born into a world both familial and secular where women were not always valued for their talents and gifts, she had to strive to be true to herself, to follow the light within her. Her mother having left the family home on her father's return from the war, Greta and her brother, Peter, were reared by their father with the support of a poorly paid housekeeper, Alice, who Greta loved and supported until the time Alice died at over 103 years of age. Greta had to struggle to break free from her father's desire that she live at home and care for the family. Education was her route to emancipation, and she became a teacher focusing on religious education. However, teaching salaries were low, and it wasn't until she was 27, and had the offer of rental property as a key worker in Crawley New Town, that she could afford to leave the family home. Once she had flown the nest, she set off on an amazingly adventurous life for a woman of her generation and background. This included four years living in northern Sweden teaching English, working in the UK as a member of the Schools Council Project for non-English Speaking Immigrants, an MA in Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University, and working for the British Council which took her to Thailand and India.

It was clear from the stories that Greta told of her life, and she told many, that she brought great energy, love and enthusiasm to bear in her work and friendships. She had a formidable network of friends from many areas of the world and of her life, including her childhood. From the way she spoke of her time teaching she was a compassionate and inspirational teacher and showed this in how she related to the children of our Meeting. Many of us valued Greta's ministry especially when it involved a bible story. Greta had the voice and oratory of a prophet.

As a child, Greta was drawn into church by her friends and explored several aspects of the Christian faith including evangelical youth camps. She retained a soft spot for some of the rituals of the Church of England and felt that in some circumstances, especially funerals, that their ritual was helpful. She found that in meeting for worship some prayers came to her unbidden and these seemed to clear a space for the worship. One she liked and recalled was: 'Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and

from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name: through Christ our Lord. Amen.'

Even in her later years she was open and welcoming making friendships among new and younger Friends. As one Friend wrote to her 'I have learned so much from you about how to approach later life (i.e. with as much gusto as the other bits) and how to be a loving Quaker and Friend in every sense, without being compliant and unquestioning.' Greta was possibly her own harshest critic. She struggled with her nature and her angry self, but she was brave in her travels, in speaking up and out and facing illness. Even as a child evacuee during the war she stood up to authority and 'rescued' her brother from abusive hosts by writing to her mother saying she must come and take him home. She read a daily 'right leaning' paper both to be challenged rather than affirmed in her thinking but also because she appreciated the quality of the journalism. She loved literature and was an avid reader to the end. Parting with her vast library of books was one of the hardest things she had to do when she downsized in her later years.

She loved beauty in art and nature and had considerable creative skills in art, gardening and flower arranging. This latter gift she offered in service to weddings and funerals held in our Meeting House. As one Friend wrote: 'She taught me to cut the flowers to different lengths and to let the air in to the arrangements to allow the flowers to be individuals in a harmonious arrangement... I think her flower arrangements reflected how she saw each of us as individuals within the meeting - each with our own gifts, needing space to breathe and create beautiful combinations out of (sometimes) clashing colours.'

Greta gave much service to our community which she valued. She served as clerk, pastoral Friend and the newsletter editor amongst other roles. She also made a commitment to take the children's meeting once a month. She researched several aspects of our local Quaker history. As part of a diploma course in Local History she looked at how various practices, including the setting up of a Quaker Adult School, impacted on the social composition of

the meeting between 1850-1890. Given her background and her work history with disadvantaged groups here and abroad, she continually questioned the class and culture of our meeting.

The talk she gave at her 90th birthday meal at Meeting included the following passage which indicates both her struggles with her darker moods and of the hope engendered by her experience of God.

After this I returned into Nottinghamshire again and went into the Vale of Beavor... And one morning, as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me and a temptation beset me; but I sat still. And it was said, 'All things come by nature'; and the elements and stars came over me so that I was in a manner quite clouded with it. But inasmuch as I sat, still and silent, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope arose in me and a true voice, which said, 'There is a living God who made all things'. And immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all, and my heart was glad, and I praised the living God.

George Fox, 1648, *Quaker faith and practice* 20.10

As we buried Greta's ashes in our Meeting House Garden, the final words of Mary Oliver's poem *In Blackwater Woods* were quoted.

Our Friend Greta was very mortal, with all the failings and frailties of being human, but she was also a wise, passionate, prophetic, loving woman with a care and concern for the 'underdog', the disadvantaged. Whilst letting her go we give thanks for the grace of God we see in her life and hope to continue to live something of her passion and wisdom for the good of our life together in our beloved community.

Signed on behalf of Lancashire Central & North Area Meeting

Held 10 January 2026

Fran Taylor, Co-Clerk

Epistles

Friends in different yearly meetings traditionally keep in touch by writing and receiving epistles. One of the final acts of our Yearly Meeting will be to agree an epistle addressed “To all Friends everywhere”.

These epistles are received and collated by Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) and can be read on their website at https://fwcc.world/resources_cpt/epistles.

Extracts will be read in Yearly Meeting in session alongside testimonies as usual.

Notes

Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Quaker unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship – a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly – internally, in relationships with others, and with the world. Local meetings for worship are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power. The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal.

This leads Quakers to put faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

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