

Agenda & notes 2

Governance supplement

Compiled for Yearly Meeting,
Friends House, London and online
1-4 May 2026

Yearly Meeting of Quakers in Britain



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1. Proposed revised Britain Yearly Meeting Governing Document

Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) [Britain Yearly Meeting]

Registered with the Charity Commission (charity no. 1127633)

Governing Document

This Governing Document was most recently amended on 2 May 2026 by minute XX of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Definitions

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain refers to the church in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, including all its local meetings for worship and its constituent meetings for church affairs as well as all their work [referred to below as the Society].

Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) [Britain Yearly Meeting] refers to the centrally held and managed policy, property, employment and work of the charity constituted by this document.

Yearly Meeting in session [Yearly Meeting] refers to the assembly, held at least once a year, in accordance with this Governing Document, that is open to all members of the Society.

Constituent Meetings for Church Affairs refers to the geographical groupings of smaller local groups (known as Local Meetings), which are recognised by Britain Yearly Meeting as Constituent Meetings for Church Affairs for the Society, and which appear on the list of Constituent Meetings

for Church Affairs maintained by the Recording Clerk of the Society. Most Constituent Meetings for Church Affairs are known as Area Meetings. Constituent Meetings for Church Affairs have power to confer membership of the Society. A Constituent Meeting for Church Affairs may be a charity in its own right, and may be registered as such with the Charity Commission, or may be part of a larger Quaker charity operating across a wider area. These charities are independent of Britain Yearly Meeting but are governed in accordance with similar principles.

The **Book of Discipline** is the written record of the faith and practice of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. The current edition is *Quaker faith & practice*.

In this Governing Document:

The term “**Member**” refers to someone who has been accepted into membership by a Constituent Meeting for Church Affairs.

The term “**Attender**” refers to someone who attends Quaker meetings regularly or otherwise has a close connection to the Society but is not a Member.

The term “**Friend**” is used to include both Members and Attenders (Friends are also known as Quakers).

1. Governing Document

Britain Yearly Meeting and its property shall be administered and managed in accordance with the provisions in this Governing Document. Further guidance can be found in the Book of Discipline.

2. Name

The name of the charitable body is Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), which also uses the working name Quakers in Britain.

3. Object

The object of Britain Yearly Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain and beyond.

4. Application of Income and Property

Within Britain Yearly Meeting money and property are used to further the object by work such as:

- a. Sustaining our church and faith: organising and maintaining the whole of the Society as responsive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit; this entails calling, briefing and running decision-making meetings with all the facilities necessary for them to work efficiently and effectively, and also conducting relations with other churches and faiths and ecumenical bodies;
- b. Supporting meetings: supporting Friends in their local organisation by providing services and advice relevant to the current needs of the Quaker community: for example such work may relate to children, elderly people, those getting married, those looking after meeting houses, and those raising funds;
- c. Promoting Quakerism: raising awareness and developing understanding about the basic tenets of *Quaker faith & practice*, such as spirituality, peace and human rights, within and without the Society;
- d. Witness through action: putting Quaker thinking into practice in relation to the problems and needs of people at home and abroad: for example, through training, conferences, work with those in positions of power, and social and development projects.

5. Amendments

Amendments to this Governing Document must be agreed by Yearly Meeting in session and recorded by minute of that meeting.

6. The conduct of business meetings

Meetings for church affairs, in which the Society conducts its business, are meetings for worship based on silence, carrying the expectation that God's guidance can be discerned if members are truly listening together and to each other. The unity that is sought depends on the willingness of all to seek the truth in each other's utterances. There is no voting in the meetings, because the Society believes that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views and inhibit the process of seeking to know the right way forward, the will of God as expressed in the sense of the meeting. Further guidance on the conduct of business meetings and the Quaker business method is set out in the Book of Discipline.

The clerk of the meeting bears the final responsibility for preparing the business, conducting the meeting and drafting the minutes of the meeting. Minutes are drafted by the clerk during the course of the meeting, but the final decision about whether the minute represents the sense of the meeting is the responsibility of the meeting itself, not of the clerk.

7. Membership

The membership of the Society consists of all those who are recorded as members by any of the Constituent Meetings for Church Affairs in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

8. Meetings for Church Affairs

Yearly Meeting in session is the final constitutional authority of the Society. It meets in session at least once each calendar year.

Yearly Meeting sessions may be held in a suitable venue and/or by electronic means. It is intended that sessions will generally be arranged in such a way as to facilitate attendance both at the venue and by electronic means.

All Members have the right to attend Yearly Meeting and to take part in its deliberations and decisions. Attenders may attend at the discretion of the clerk of Yearly Meeting.

9. Notice of meetings

The dates, times and places at which Yearly Meeting sessions are to be held shall be determined by the Yearly Meeting in session on the recommendation of its Agenda Planning Committee. Notice of these details (including the platform for attendance by electronic means) shall be given by publishing them on the official Yearly Meeting website.

At least one Yearly Meeting session shall take place in each calendar year, and it is intended that there will normally be four Yearly Meeting sessions per year.

It is intended that notice will be given at least a year in advance, but at least three months' notice must be given of any Yearly Meeting session other than an additional Yearly Meeting session as described below.

Attendance by electronic means will include any method of remote attendance approved by Yearly Meeting which allows all those attending the meeting to communicate contemporaneously with each other.

Exceptionally, an additional Yearly Meeting session may be called by either the trustees or the Agenda Planning Committee on the recommendation of a combination of any three of the clerks or assistant clerks of the following: Yearly Meeting, the Agenda Planning Committee and the trustees. Notice of an additional Yearly Meeting session shall be published via the official Yearly Meeting website and shall include the information required for Yearly Meeting sessions set out in the first paragraph of this section. The minimum notice period for an additional Yearly Meeting session shall be two weeks.

In exceptional circumstances any three of the clerks or assistant clerks of the following: Yearly Meeting, the Agenda Planning Committee and the trustees may change the venue and means of attendance at a Yearly Meeting session (including cancelling the venue and making the meeting accessible only by electronic means) or cancel or postpone the date of a Yearly Meeting session by giving notice of the change via the official Yearly Meeting website. Notice of the change shall be given as soon as possible, but may be given up until the time of the relevant Yearly Meeting session. Where a Yearly Meeting session is postponed then the postponed session must be held no later than three months after the originally scheduled date.

10. Clerks

The Yearly Meeting in session shall appoint a clerk and an assistant clerk on the nomination of Central Nominations Committee.

The terms of service of the clerk and assistant clerk to Yearly Meeting are set out in the terms of reference of the Agenda Planning Committee.

In the event that a nomination for clerk is not approved then the appointment may be deferred for further discernment by Central Nominations Committee or an alternative appointment may be made by that Yearly Meeting in session (if it determines that an appointment is urgently required).

11. Trustees

A body of 10 to 14 Friends shall be appointed by Yearly Meeting in session to act as trustees. Yearly Meeting shall appoint a clerk to the trustees and shall approve the trustees' terms of reference.

Trustees shall generally be appointed to serve for a term of three years, with reappointment possible for a further three years. Ordinarily the maximum term of service will be six years. If a trustee is initially appointed to start their service in the middle of a year, or if they are appointed to serve as the clerk to trustees then they may serve a maximum total term of seven continuous years as a trustee.

Urgent Appointments

Where there is an urgent need to appoint an additional trustee between sessions of Yearly Meeting then the clerk and assistant clerk of Yearly Meeting acting jointly may make such an appointment on the recommendation of Central Nominations Committee. Any appointment made in this way must be taken to the next session of Yearly Meeting for consideration and, if appropriate, confirmation. If the appointment is not confirmed, the trustee will cease to act at the session of Yearly Meeting at which the decision not to confirm the appointment is made.

12. Eligibility, disqualification and removal of trustees

Only a Member is eligible to be appointed as a trustee. An appointed trustee may hold office unless they

- a. notify to the recording clerk of the Society a wish to be released from service as a trustee;
- b. cease to be a member of the Society;
- c. fail to attend two trustee meetings in a row without prior reasonable notice, as determined by the clerk of trustees;
- d. are determined by the Yearly Meeting to no longer be a fit or suitable person to carry out the duties of a trustee;
- e. become physically or mentally incapable of managing their own affairs;
- f. come to the end of their term of service.

The trustees may recommend the removal of a trustee under the terms of (c), or (d) or (e) above. Any such recommendation shall be minuted by the trustees and shall be reported to the next session of Yearly Meeting. A trustee shall only cease to hold office under (c), (d) or (e) above if the Yearly Meeting in session decides that they should cease to hold office. On receipt of a trustee minute recommending the removal of a trustee under (d) above then Yearly Meeting will seek that trustee's views on the matter in such manner as the Yearly Meeting thinks fit, for example by asking Central Nominations Committee to arrange this. Yearly Meeting shall take into account any views expressed by the trustee before reaching its decision. The decision of Yearly Meeting shall be final and binding.

Friends who are legally ineligible to act or who are disqualified from acting as trustees shall not be able so to act nor to continue so to act.

Release or removal of a trustee from office under (a) to (e) above shall be recorded by minute of Yearly Meeting.

13. Meetings of the trustees

The trustees shall meet at least twice a year and otherwise as required,

using Quaker business method as described in the Book of Discipline, and recording their decisions by minute. Trustees may agree to hold meetings by video conference.

An effective working strength of the trustee body, normally represented by at least half of the trustees for the time being, should be present for decisions to be made in right ordering.

Staff may attend trustee meetings in order to provide the trustees with information about their work, and so that they can interpret and carry out trustee decisions more effectively. Staff are not trustees and are not responsible for the decisions made by the trustee meeting. The trustees shall have the power to exclude staff from parts of their meetings, as appropriate.

14. The funds and property of Britain Yearly Meeting

The trustees are guardians of the assets of Britain Yearly Meeting with responsibility for ensuring that they are properly used for the religious and charitable purposes for which they were given in accordance with this Governing Document. They have overall responsibility for the financial probity of the conduct of the business of Britain Yearly Meeting and for ensuring that it has appropriate systems of control, financial and otherwise, which will ensure high standards of governance and compliance with the legal and regulatory requirements.

The trustees shall have the following powers, which they should always exercise in accordance with any relevant guidance contained in the Book of Discipline:

- a. To raise funds from individual contributors and meetings; from legacy income; from grants and other sources outside Britain Yearly Meeting; from dividends and interest from investments; from rents from investment properties; and from the sale of goods or services provided in furtherance of Britain Yearly Meeting's objects;
- b. To buy, lease or acquire property, and to dispose of it;
- c. To borrow money;

- d. To set aside income as a reserve;
- e. To make investments in accordance with legal constraints and the ethical testimonies of the Society;
- f. To co-operate with other charities, or to enter into partnerships;
- g. To establish or support trusts or institutions or trading companies formed for charitable purposes within Britain Yearly Meeting's charitable object;
- h. To employ staff;
- i. To pay pensions;
- j. To obtain and pay for goods and services;
- k. To reimburse the reasonable expenses of Friends, including the trustees, incurred when acting on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting;
- l. To open and operate bank accounts;
- m. To effect insurance;
- n. To appoint an independent auditor of Britain Yearly Meeting's accounts;
- o. To insure themselves against the costs of a successful defence to a criminal prosecution brought against them as charity trustees or against personal liability incurred in respect of any act or omission which is or is alleged to be in breach of trust or breach of duty;
- p. To delegate their powers or functions as set out in Clause 16 below;
- q. To establish committees or working groups for carrying out agreed programmes of work;
- r. To do all other such lawful things as are necessary for the efficient conduct of the charity's administration and the management of its property and affairs.

15. Trustees not to be personally interested

Subject to the provisions of the second paragraph of this clause, and subject to sub-clause 14(o), no trustee shall acquire any interest in property belonging to Britain Yearly Meeting (otherwise than as a trustee) or receive remuneration or be materially interested (otherwise than as a trustee) in any

contract entered into by the trustees.

Any trustee for the time being who possesses specialist skills or knowledge may charge and be paid reasonable fees for business done by them or their firm when instructed by the other trustees to act on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting, provided that at no time shall a majority of the trustees benefit under this provision and that a trustee shall withdraw from any meeting at which their own instruction or remuneration, or that of their firm, is under discussion.

16. Power of trustees to delegate

The trustees may delegate any of their powers or functions to a committee including two or more trustees, but the terms of any such delegation must be recorded by minute. The trustees may impose conditions when delegating, including the conditions that:

- a. the relevant powers are to be exercised exclusively by the committee to which they are delegated;
- b. no expenditure may be incurred except in accordance with a budget previously agreed with the trustees.

The trustees may delegate decision-making to staff.

The trustees may revoke or alter a delegation.

All acts and proceedings of any committee with delegated trustee powers or functions must be fully and promptly reported to the trustees.

17. Repairs and insurance

All the buildings of Britain Yearly Meeting shall be kept in repair and buildings and contents shall be adequately insured. The trustees shall also insure suitably in respect of all appropriate liability insurances, including employer's, occupier's and public liability.

18. Annual Report and Accounts

The trustees' report and accounts shall be prepared on an annual basis and approved by the trustees and shall be presented to Yearly Meeting in session for consideration and acceptance. The accounts shall form part of the Proceedings of Yearly Meeting. They shall be submitted to the Charity Commission upon completion.

19. Registered particulars

Britain Yearly Meeting shall be registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for England and Wales which shall be notified of any changes to this Governing Document.

Signed:

Clerk of Yearly Meeting

Assistant Clerk of Yearly Meeting

This Governing Document was adopted on the twenty ninth day of May 2006 by Minute 28 of Britain Yearly Meeting and was amended as follows:

- 2 December 2006 by Minute 4 of Meeting for Sufferings,
- 5 July 2008 by minute S/08/07/13 of Meeting for Sufferings
- 7 August 2014 by minute 34 of Britain Yearly Meeting
- 6 August 2021 by minute 28 of Britain Yearly Meeting
- 2 May 2026 by minute XX of Britain Yearly Meeting

2. Proposed revised Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees terms of reference

1. Summary of Purpose

- 1.1 Britain Yearly Meeting appoints the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (“the Trustees”) to act on its behalf as trustees of the work, assets and property held directly by Britain Yearly Meeting.
- 1.2 The Trustees are accountable to the Yearly Meeting for the right stewardship of its centrally managed work, assets and property.
- 1.3 The Trustees are legally responsible for the broad direction, general control and management of the administration of the affairs of the charity, Britain Yearly Meeting, with the objective of enabling the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain to be sustained, witness, flourish and grow¹.

2. Authority, relationships and delegation

- 2.1 The Trustees are responsible for the implementation of the long-term vision articulated by Britain Yearly Meeting in session. Trustees report regularly to Yearly Meeting, including in relation to their future plans.
- 2.2 The Trustees may establish committees, including standing committees, or trading companies, and delegate to them those aspects of the work of trustees as can be more effectively carried out by such arrangements. All such appointments and delegation shall be subject to the provisions set out in the Britain Yearly Meeting governing document².
- 2.3 The Trustees oversee the work of Management Meeting and are the employers of Britain Yearly Meeting staff. They may delegate tasks to staff, whilst holding overall accountability.

1 See *Quaker faith & practice* 8.17

2 See the [Governing Document](http://www.quaker.org.uk/bymtrustees), latest version available here: www.quaker.org.uk/bymtrustees.

2.4 The Trustees are responsible for legal compliance, monitoring and scrutiny on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting. They ensure that the centrally managed work is being properly governed and managed consistent with the religious and charitable object of Britain Yearly Meeting³.

3. Duties

3.1 Strategic direction

Yearly Meeting in session decides on the overall vision for Quakers in Britain. The Trustees should ensure that:

- a the vision discerned and the concerns articulated by Yearly Meeting are pursued responsibly and within the available resources. Trustees provide strategic direction by establishing priorities and criteria for the development of the centrally managed work programmes, consulting with Yearly Meeting for this purpose;
- b there is multi-year planning, to include an operational plan and budget for the centrally managed work and a process for measuring progress;
- c they provide regular progress reports on how the centrally managed work is meeting the concerns of Yearly Meeting. They should consult Yearly Meeting regularly and have regard to its guidance;
- d they keep under review the work of the committees reporting to them, monitor their terms of reference and if necessary amend them. Where required to do so they bring suggested changes to Yearly Meeting, for consideration and approval⁴.

3.2 Stewardship of resources

The Trustees are responsible for:

- a raising funds for the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting;

3 See the [Governing Document](#), latest version available here: www.quaker.org.uk/bymtrustees, and *Quaker faith & practice* 8.03.

4 See *Quaker faith & practice* 8.18.

- b. monitoring financial and operational performance against the operational plan and budget;
- c. determining, and ensuring the application of, appropriate policies for accounting and investment;
- d. ensuring that systems are in place to maintain:
- e. the sustainable stewardship of assets;
- f. the financial probity and solvency of the operations of the centrally managed work;
- g. the discharge of the appropriate legal and regulatory obligations;
- h. ensuring the sound management and usage of all assets, property, and systems (e.g. I.T.) in the ownership of Britain Yearly Meeting.

3.3 Employment

- a. The Trustees act on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting as the employer of all the staff engaged on the centrally managed work. The Trustees are responsible for:
- b. the recruitment and appointment of senior staff at Management Meeting level, including the Recording Clerk;
- c. the work of the Recording Clerk, through the clerk to Trustees;
- d. the constitution and oversight of Management Meeting.

3.4 Governance

The Trustees are responsible for ensuring the good governance and legal compliance of the centrally managed work. They have the duty to:

- a. appoint the external auditors; to consider and approve the Annual report and accounts and to present this to Yearly Meeting. The Trustees are responsible for filing the annual report and accounts with the Charity Commission;
- b. ensure that an appropriate process is in place to assess and manage the risks faced by Britain Yearly Meeting, and to keep under review systems of governance and internal audit to ensure that necessary standards

are maintained, through the adoption and implementation of suitable policies, and in other ways;

- c. liaise with the Charity Commission, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (working with Quakers in Scotland), and other statutory bodies on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain;
- d. agree Memoranda of Understanding as required for work with other bodies;
- e. undertake any task laid upon them by Yearly Meeting or to report their reasons for failing to do so.

4. Membership and attendance

- 4.1 Ten to fourteen trustees are appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of the Central Nominations Committee to serve for a three year period. The period of service will normally begin on 1 January of the year following appointment at Yearly Meeting and end on 31 December of the appropriate year. Reappointment is possible for a second term. Ordinarily the maximum term of service will be six years. If a trustee is initially appointed in the middle of a year, or if they are appointed to serve as the clerk to trustees then they may serve a maximum total continuous term of seven years as a trustee.
- 4.2 In addition to the trustees in 4.1 a clerk is appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees. The period of service is normally for a three-year period beginning on 1 January of the year following appointment at Yearly Meeting.
- 4.3 The Trustees may nominate and appoint an assistant clerk from within their number if they wish.
- 4.4 The Yearly Meeting treasurer will serve ex-officio as a trustee, and is appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, normally for a three year period beginning on 1 January of the year following appointment at Yearly Meeting.
- 4.5 The method of appointment and mechanism for removal of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees are described in the Britain Yearly Meeting Governing Document.

- 4.6 Every trustee must comply with the legal requirements for eligibility as a trustee and accept responsibility as a trustee for the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting.
- 4.7 There will be no remuneration for service as a trustee, save as set out in the Governing Document.
- 4.8 The Recording Clerk, as secretary to the Trustees; the Deputy Recording Clerk; and other members of Management Meeting will normally attend meetings of the Trustees. Other members of staff may be asked to attend by invitation of the clerk. No member of staff will be designated as carrying trustee responsibility. The Trustees shall have the power to exclude staff from parts of their meetings, as appropriate.

5. Conduct and frequency of meetings

- 5.1 Meetings of the Trustees are meetings for worship for business, held in faithful waiting on the Spirit, with the expectation of being guided to uphold the religious imperatives and values of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain.
- 5.2 The Trustees shall meet at least twice each year and additionally as required. They may agree to hold some of these meetings by video conference.
- 5.3 The Trustees should agree a procedure for making decisions between meetings when necessary.

6. Agreement and review of the Terms of Reference

- 6.1 These terms of reference shall be reviewed by no later than 31 December 2031.
- 6.2 Approved by minute XX of Britain Yearly Meeting held on 2 May 2026.

3. Proposed changes to *Quaker faith & practice* - Chapter 6

These contains the suggested changes to *Quaker faith & practice* that were shared with Meeting for Sufferings in December 2025. These changes to chapter 6 are being presented to Yearly Meeting for consideration and hopefully approval.

Any observations, or suggestions for improvements to the text can be sent to the Church Government Advisory Group secretary, Michael S Booth at qfp@quaker.org.uk

Yearly Meeting

Introduction

6.01 We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another's faces, and open our hearts one to another in the Truth of God once a year, as formerly it used to be.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1668

6.02 Yearly Meeting is now an occasion when the concerns of Friends can be shared with the whole community of Quakers in Britain, as it seeks God's guidance and relates each particular insight or service to the others brought before it. At different stages of its history the agenda and pattern of Yearly Meeting have been built up in different ways.

History

6.03 In the seventeenth century our yearly meeting grew out of a series of conferences of ministering Friends, some regional, some national. Early examples include the meetings at Swannington in 1654 and at Balby in 1656 (remembered more for the postscript to its lengthy letter of

counsel than the letter itself), and the meeting at Skipton the same year. The general meeting for the whole nation held at Beckerings Park, Bedfordshire, for three days in May 1658, was attended by several thousand Friends. This might be considered as the first Yearly Meeting although no annual continuity followed in the 1660s due to persecution by the authorities and outbreaks of contagious disease. The meeting in May 1668 was followed by one at Christmastime which lasted into 1669, since when Yearly Meeting has been held annually. 1668 is the traditional date of establishment of London Yearly Meeting, which became the national Yearly Meeting in 1672.

The main exercise of Yearly Meeting related to ‘the state of the Society’ as revealed by the answers to the Queries (a set of questions about the “right ordering” of local Meetings) or, after written replies were discontinued, by triennial reports from quarterly meetings. Many (though not all) of the meetings up to 1677 were ‘select’, that is, confined to ‘publick’ or ministering men Friends; but from 1678 Yearly Meetings became representative rather than select in character. Minutes are preserved from 1672.

Until the mid-nineteenth century the life of the yearly meeting continued to centre on the answers from quarterly meetings to Friends’ queries and the ‘Epistles Foreign and Domestick’. Epistles and travelling ministers between them made the Atlantic community of Friends a reality; smuggling in Cornwall or dissension in Nantucket received equal thought and attention. The education of Friends’ children was a recurring theme, and with the establishment of Ackworth (1779) and Sidcot (1808) the reports from Friends’ boarding schools made increasing claims on the time of the meetings. The predictable answers to queries, lengthy reports and other documents read aloud, long-winded Friends, the narrow range of interests and the minutiae of procedure must have been stifling to the rebels. ‘And now for about an hour,’ wrote a young Friend in 1858, ‘the YM talked to points of order. When 5 or 6 courses are mentioned and a good many friends speak to each, it does not seem difficult to spend an hour or

more in this way.’ ‘It is difficult,’ he added charitably, ‘to see how this is altogether to be avoided.’

In reality Yearly Meeting may not have been as parochial as the cautious minutes show. These can point to certain outstanding sessions – that of 1783 on the slave trade, for instance, or that from 1818 on capital punishment. Yearly Meeting was not merely preoccupied with introspective consideration of the state of the Society: it sought to awaken the public conscience. A statement in 1856 on liberty of conscience was translated into half a dozen languages and taken by deputations of concerned Friends to ecclesiastics and statesmen from Madrid to St Petersburg. Petitions to parliament and memorials to the monarch covered a wide range of concern. When in 1842 Caroline Fox with her brother and father called on the philosopher Thomas Carlyle, ‘he wanted to know what we were doing at the Yearly Meeting, and what were its objects and functions, and remarked on the deepening observable amongst Friends; but when we told of the letter to the Queen recommendatory of peace in Afghanistan, he was terribly amused. “Poor little Queen! She’d be glad enough to live in peace and quietness if the Afghans would but submit to her conditions.”’

‘Every Quakeress,’ wrote Charles Lamb in 1823, ‘is a lily; and when they come up in bands to their Whitsun-conferences, whitening the easterly streets of the metropolis, from all parts of the United Kingdom, they show like troops of the Shining Ones.’ From 1656 Women’s Meetings and Women’s Monthly Meetings had been held, but it was not until 1784 that a Women’s Yearly Meeting was established, with the right to communicate with women’s quarterly meetings. From the 1880s some joint sessions of men and women Friends were held, and in 1896 Yearly Meeting decided that ‘in future women Friends are to be recognised as forming a constituent part of all our meetings for church affairs equally with their brethren.’ Some separate sessions still continued but the Women’s Yearly Meeting was laid down in 1907.

After the Yearly Meeting was constituted on a representative basis in 1678 ministering Friends, and later elders, met with members of London's Second Day Morning Meeting (the weekly gathering of 'ministering Friends in and about the city') at the beginning and the close of Yearly Meeting. This gathering assumed a measure of national authority – it issued, for instance, in 1702 'A brief memorial of some necessary things', which was the basis of the advices on ministry – and in 1754 it was constituted as the Yearly Meeting of Ministers & Elders. In 1876 the meeting was enlarged in membership and renamed the Yearly Meeting on Ministry & Oversight, but as part of the egalitarian movement of the late nineteenth century it was decided to discontinue the separate hierarchy of preparative, monthly and quarterly meetings on ministry and oversight, and, in consequence, the Yearly Meeting on Ministry & Oversight last met in 1906. Elders and overseers subsequently met separately for conference.

Until as recently as 1861 Yearly Meeting was in theory attended only by representatives, together with 'such ministering Friends as may be in town, and the correspondents or members of the Meeting for Sufferings'. From the mid eighteenth century (if not earlier) the doors were in fact open to any man Friend, and much business was in consequence referred to the Large Committee, which was confined to those constitutionally entitled to be there. When at length the Yearly Meeting sessions were opened to all men Friends as a right some felt that the Yearly Meeting would degenerate into mere conversation and lose its essentially religious and deliberative purpose.

In almost every generation there has been a Right Holding of Yearly Meeting Committee, though its title varies from one occasion to another. Such a group has the opportunity of deciding whether we need to direct our attention to constitutional change, or to the shortcomings of our human nature. In 1902 John Wilhelm Rowntree and Edward Worsdell applied their minds to the conduct of Yearly Meeting with devastating remarks: 'Discussion confused and futile', 'discussion disproportionate and prolix', 'a demonstration not a

conference'. It was two years before this outburst that the first memorandum of agenda had been issued, and it had been agreed to print some reports in advance.

In 1905 Yearly Meeting was held for the first time out of London. Meeting at Leeds it received at its opening session a message from the venerable patriarch J Bevan Braithwaite, who, after sixty-four years of unbroken attendance, felt the journey inadvisable. 'Coming together as we do', wrote the Yearly Meeting in its response, 'amid such new surroundings, the thought of the faithful lives of service which have been given in the past to the work of our Society comes with peculiar power and helpfulness to us, and as we listened to thy letter and thought of the long years in which thou wast present during the sittings of the yearly meeting, the desire arose that we might be more faithful in giving ourselves to the work.' We too may re-echo the desire that we may be inspired by those who have gone before us in our yearly meeting but not fettered by their procedures.

In 1918 Mary Jane Godlee was the first woman to act as Yearly Meeting Clerk when John H Barlow, a member of Friends Service Committee, was called to attend the High Court for publishing a pacifist leaflet without submitting it to the censor. He was serving as Clerk to Yearly Meeting that day so left the meeting to go to court, and Mary Jane Godlee took his place at the table. The first woman to be appointed as Yearly Meeting Clerk was W Maud Brayshaw who served from 1943 - 1948.

The organisational reforms of the late nineteenth century continued into the 1920s. In 1924 Yearly Meeting ceased the practice of recording ministers, a response to Friends' disquiet about giving 'undue prominence to the ministry of a restricted body of Friends', which was felt to 'discourage ministry from many who might otherwise feel moved to offer it.' In 1926 London Yearly Meeting moved from Devonshire House in Bishopsgate to the purpose-built Friends House opposite Euston Station.

The twentieth century witnessed a considerable growth in the number of standing committees of the Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, and in their scope of work. Increasingly, the agenda of Yearly Meeting was built up round concerns brought through these committees.

During the 1970s and 1980s residential Yearly Meetings (6.22) were becoming increasingly popular, with Friends appreciating the events alongside the sessions as much as the business. Hence it was decided to try out a gathering without the formal Yearly Meeting business, answering the needs of Friends to live together in community and to explore issues and activities for which there was little programmed time at a meeting for church affairs. The first such Summer Gathering was held in Bradford in 1991. Further Summer Gatherings were held at four-yearly intervals, all different and all successful. Subsequently, the administrative pressures of organising these events led to the holding of two experimental combined residential Yearly Meetings and Summer Gatherings. The first such Yearly Meeting Gathering was held at York in 2009.

In 1994 London Yearly Meeting agreed to change its name to the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, or in short form, Britain Yearly Meeting. This decision followed a recommendation by Meeting for Sufferings after a consultation with monthly meetings. The new name was chosen to express the identity of the yearly meeting in a more inclusive way, so that Friends who were physically distant from London could feel more fully part of the whole. It also reflects more accurately the geographical area which is covered: England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The new name came into effect on 1 January 1995.

The Covid-19 pandemic spread around the world in early 2020. A series of restrictions on travel and meeting were imposed from March 2020. A residential Yearly Meeting had already been planned to take place in Bath in the summer but this was not possible due to these restrictions.

By this time most Friends had access to the internet, so Yearly Meeting was moved online using business conferencing technology for remote meetings and took place in November. 'Not since 1668 has anything – not even world wars – prevented Yearly Meeting, a time for Quakers to gather in stillness to listen to the promptings of love and truth.' The final part of the concluding minute – 'There being no further business for the Yearly Meeting, we separate, hoping to meet again from 31 July – 5 August 2021, should nothing occur to prevent' – felt very powerful, holding much emotion and learned experience.

In 2021 Yearly Meeting Gathering was held online because of continuing Covid-19 restrictions. The need to take care of each other meant that all events were held virtually for this three-week festival of faith and friendship, including activities for children & families, young people and Junior Yearly Meeting. In 2022 Yearly Meeting returned to Friends House in London, with a continuing substantial attendance online. Such blended Yearly Meetings have become the norm ever since.

In 2024 Yearly Meeting agreed to alter its structure. Following the conclusion of the four-day meeting in London in 2026, Yearly Meeting would cease to be a single annual gathering and would become a more flexible series of linked sessions lasting one day or longer and taking place throughout the year at different locations: a continuing Yearly Meeting. Meeting for Sufferings – the representative body which had dealt with all matters affecting Britain Yearly Meeting between formal sessions – was laid down so that more discernment and decision-making could be done by a wider group of Friends meeting more frequently than once a year.

Yearly Meeting continues to receive reports from Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and other committees. It provides an opportunity to scrutinise and affirm the work done in the name of Friends in our meetings and by our committees and staff. It lays matters of concern before a gathered session of Yearly Meeting for divine

guidance, discernment testing or decision. It informs and educates us, as a meeting for learning. It agrees constitutional changes and amendments to our book of discipline. It strengthens our witness as a religious society and encourages us in our living of the testimonies. It inspires us to action, corporately in our meetings or individually and in groups. It searches our spiritual depths and refreshes our spiritual life as individuals and corporately. It reinforces the sense of community in our meetings and in Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole. It praises, gives thanks to God, and celebrates.

Purposes and functions

6.04 The intent and holy design of our annual assemblies, in their first constitution, were for a great and weighty oversight and Christian care of the affairs of the churches pertaining to our holy profession and Christian communion; that good order, true love, unity and concord may be faithfully followed and maintained among all of us.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1718

6.05 The “Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain” in session is the final constitutional authority of this Society. It is commonly known as Britain Yearly Meeting. Geographically it covers England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Its membership consists of all who belong to the area meetings in those places. All members of the Yearly Meeting have the right to attend and to take part in its deliberations, whether at the physical location or online. (See 6.16 and 6.17)

6.06 The primary purpose of the Yearly Meeting, continuing in its several sessions throughout each year, is to discern the leadings of the Spirit for the spiritual life, work and witness of Quakers in Britain. It does this by gathering Friends together for learning, worshipping, and discerning. Through that discernment, it seeks to make decisions, issue public statements, and respond to calls for action.

- 6.07 To fulfil that purpose, the deliberations of yearly meeting in session may include:
- a. fostering the individual and corporate spiritual life of Quakers in Britain, furthering the development of its visionary and prophetic role;
 - b. supporting and encouraging individual and corporate witness of faith in action;
 - c. ensuring appropriate arrangements for keeping under review, testing and seasoning existing and new concerns referred to it by area meetings and other bodies;
 - d. receiving minutes from area meetings and other eligible bodies as appropriate, and arranging for them to be considered;
 - e. receiving reports and advice from Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (including their annual report and audited financial statements), giving guidance to them and holding them to account;
 - f. receiving reports and advice from other committees and bodies appointed by the yearly meeting, giving guidance to them and holding them to account;
 - g. deciding long-term strategy and priorities for the centrally-managed work and witness;
 - h. appointing Friends to serve the yearly meeting in various capacities, including as representatives to other yearly meetings, following nomination by the relevant nominating bodies;
 - i. making or authorising public statements, in accordance with its approved policy on speaking out, on behalf of the yearly meeting;
 - j. ensuring that appropriate entries are made in the prison and court register;
 - k. ensuring that communication throughout the yearly meeting is fostered;
 - l. making decisions on constitutional matters, including recognising

area meetings and recording changes in their composition;

- m.** determining, on the recommendation of the Agenda Planning Committee, the dates and venues of future sessions of the yearly meeting and arrangements for summoning a special yearly meeting if required.

6.08 The agenda may comprise:

- a.** minutes from area meetings, Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales, Quakers in Scotland or Young Friends General Meeting, and minutes or memoranda from committees sharing with the yearly meeting as a whole some concern which has their united support;
- b.** proposals for amendments to our book of discipline forwarded by the Agenda Planning Committee in accordance with the process currently approved; details of this process may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk;
- c.** certification that every part of Britain Yearly Meeting is producing proper financial accounts and property records (14.36);
- d.** the annual report of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and audited financial statements for the preceding year (6.25);
- e.** the tabular statement (6.09);
- f.** the report of the Agenda Planning Committee;
- g.** testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends, forwarded by area and general meetings;
- h.** epistles received from other yearly meetings and other Friends' bodies, reminding us of our membership in a world family of Friends;
- i.** subjects initiated by the Agenda Planning Committee

Items b, c, d and e are presented for consideration and acceptance, the Trustees' annual report and financial statements having been approved and forwarded by Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (8.03).

6.09 The tabular statement is a factual account of changes over the preceding year in the status and membership of the constituent meetings of the yearly meeting, together with other information on the membership of the yearly meeting, compiled by the Recording Clerk from information supplied by area meetings (4.10.h, 11.37).

6.10 In 1999 the Agenda Committee wrote:

We see Yearly Meetings as events in the life of the institution of Britain Yearly Meeting which can involve:

- constitutional decision-making;
- annually overseeing and guiding the stewardship exercised between Yearly Meetings;
- settling policy on major areas of work or witness;
- promoting teaching and learning;
- offering inspiration and leadership;
- celebrating together;
- re-dedicating ourselves;
- calling us to action;
- creating and sustaining a community, including those both under and over nineteen.

Yearly Meetings are also occasions in which we can learn, practise, improve, and take back to our local meetings ways of conducting business which are rooted in Quaker tradition and our own experience yet also meet contemporary challenges. They should be a focus for every facet of Quakerism, constantly reminding us of what it means to be a Quaker today.

We are aware that we do not always achieve these purposes in our Yearly Meetings as well as we might; and indeed that it may not be possible to fulfil all the purposes to an equal extent at an individual Yearly Meeting. Seeking the right balance at any one Yearly Meeting is a necessary though difficult task. Our experience is that

Yearly Meeting is most fruitful when its programme includes some decision-making and 'doing together', alongside more reflective sessions; and when it focuses on doing what only Yearly Meeting can do.

- 6.11 In the course of reflecting on his experience as secretary from 1940 to 1945 of Friends War Victims Relief Committee and Friends Relief Service, Roger Wilson wrote in 1949:

Yearly Meeting is not, in the last resort, made up of a body of experts. People who know a great deal about the matter in hand may do most of the talking, central committee members familiar with the complexities of translating convictions into practical terms may appear to be leading the meeting. But a few halting yet sincere hesitations, uttered by a Friend from a small meeting in a distant county may, in fact, be of more significance in revealing a matter in its true setting than all the sophistication of the committee worthies. Again and again on deep issues it is reality as known and experienced by the simple and single-minded meeting, that does not know too much to have lost its simple faith, that guides the Society; and the central committee or its administrator who knows that its service is, in the end, related to the life of the local meetings in the country, will have a deep respect for the weight of Yearly Meeting.

- 6.12 No organisation or planning can produce a good Yearly Meeting if those who attend come for an inadequate reason. When the Religious Society of Friends gathers for its annual assembly, it does so because it seeks to come to know the mind of God on the various affairs to be brought forward... We are ordinary people, with the shortcomings of ordinary people, and there is laid upon us the necessity of patience with one another in all our gatherings, and especially in Yearly Meeting, and the willingness to accept the imperfect arising from our human limitations. When therefore we find our Yearly Meeting falling short of the standard which it should reach, whether in worship or in deliberation, it behoves each of us to listen more intently for

the voice of the Spirit, and to seek the more earnestly that every contribution, be it by spoken word or in silence, is that which is in accord with the divine leading. In our worship at Yearly Meeting, it is laid upon us with special weight to listen. It is not our ministry that is required in worship, nor our inspiration in deliberations, but we seek to hear the true word of God speaking through our frail humanity and leading us to the place where he would have us be. This is the right holding of Yearly Meeting.

Right Holding of Yearly Meeting Committee, 1960

6.13 The service and counsel of John Morland (1837–1934):

His attendance at Yearly Meeting was increasingly prized, and his personality felt to be a permeating influence. To the last his judgment retained its acuteness. How frequently in a few trenchant sentences he has cut through a problem or re-stated confused issues... The precepts laid down by him whilst clerk of Yearly Meeting (1899–1903) were scrupulously observed by himself: ‘Do not speak without a sense of the imperative ought; speak audibly, not loudly but clearly; speak shortly.’

Testimony of Mid-Somerset Monthly Meeting, 1934

6.14 Mary Hughes (1860–1941) comes with heart and mind prepared:

Anyone who lived with her during April and May knew how intensely Friends’ Yearly Meeting was on her mind. It was as important to her as ‘going up to Jerusalem’. For weeks beforehand it came into her prayers in the morning, at meal times and with friends. She wished that God’s power would be in the meetings, that people would go forth from them with a new vision of God’s work for them, a new sensitiveness towards their fellows, especially the distressed.

Rosa Hobhouse, 1949

Clerks

- 6.15 The Yearly Meeting shall appoint clerks for a specified term of service, on the nomination of Central Nominations Committee (6.26).

Representatives

6.16 All Friends are encouraged to attend Yearly Meeting online or at the venue. Yearly Meeting has agreed that area meetings, specified Yearly Meeting committees and certain other bodies should appoint representatives to attend Yearly Meeting.

Representatives to Yearly Meeting should be appointed by the body that will send them through their usual nominations process.

Representatives normally serve for three calendar years, up to a maximum of six. This ensures that continuity of experience is balanced with opportunities for other Friends to participate in Yearly Meeting.

Attenders may be appointed to serve as Yearly Meeting representatives. However, Yearly Meeting may close any part of the meeting to non-members if it feels the need to do so.

Britain Yearly Meeting staff should not be appointed as representatives to Yearly Meeting.

6.17 Appointing bodies are encouraged to consider these aspects of the role when discerning the names of representatives.

- The discernment of Yearly Meeting is strengthened by perspectives from its different parts, so representatives should reflect the physical, spiritual, geographical and cultural variety among British Friends.
- Each area meeting is asked to appoint one representative. Additional representatives may be appointed according to a formula agreed by YM, where circumstances such as the size or geographical spread of the area meeting warrant this
- Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales, Quakers in Scotland, and Young Friends General Meeting are asked to appoint representatives to Yearly Meeting sessions.

- Appointed representatives should expect to be able to attend most of the Yearly Meeting sessions during their term of service. This will help continuity and ensure a reasonable minimum attendance at all sessions for Yearly Meeting business.

All Quaker communities should consider how they can ensure that their members know about Yearly Meeting and encourage them to attend.

- 6.18 The Agenda Planning Committee may invite any Yearly Meeting committee to send a member to a Yearly Meeting session when it feels that their attendance would be of particular assistance to the discernment of Yearly Meeting as a whole.

The clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting trustees, the Yearly Meeting treasurer or a representative of trustees, should be present at all Yearly Meeting sessions. A Clerk or a member of Central Nominations Committee should be present whenever nominations are requested or brought forward.

When committees feel that more than one of their members should be present at Yearly Meeting they might consider the option of online attendance to reduce the costs of travel

Visiting Friends

- 6.19 Members of the Society not belonging to Britain Yearly Meeting may attend the sessions of the Yearly Meeting on producing a minute or letter of introduction signed by the clerk of their own meeting or otherwise satisfying the clerk of their membership. However, Friends in sojourning membership of an area meeting (11.27) are exempt from this requirement.

Permission to non-members

- 6.20 Permission for the attendance of non-members at one or more sessions may be given at the discretion of the clerk, if satisfied that their presence is likely to be of service to the Society. Such permission should be sought well in advance of Yearly Meeting in

accordance with the process set out in the Yearly Meeting registration documents on each occasion. Last-minute requests should not be made. Non-members should receive suitable support and guidance to enable their contribution to be of service and for them to benefit from attendance at Yearly Meeting. If called to speak in a Yearly Meeting session, non-members should be sensitive to the fact that they are not in membership and should make this known.

Non-members attending Yearly Meeting sessions must be aware that they may be asked to leave during consideration of certain sensitive business at the discretion of the clerks.

Time of meeting

6.21 From 2026, the Yearly Meeting gathers in session more often than once a year. These sessions are responsible for continuing deliberation, discernment and the oversight of our corporate religious life and witness. There may be a longer gathering over several days, and several shorter further gatherings during the year. From time to time there may be longer residential Yearly Meetings as needed. All these gatherings have the same constitutional authority, purpose, agenda preparation, decision-making processes, and attendance arrangements.

The dates and locations of future Yearly Meeting sessions and of any residential Yearly Meetings are agreed in advance by Yearly Meeting in session on the recommendation of its agenda planning committee.

- 6.22 The purpose of occasional residential gatherings, in addition to considering normal yearly meeting business, is
- a. to strengthen and support the witness and activity of Friends by continuing the personal friendships, spiritual inspiration and momentum that residential gatherings provide;
 - b. to provide time, at a more leisurely pace than is normally possible during regular Yearly Meeting sessions, for the exploration of those issues and concerns which by their nature require such time;

- c. to provide the space for exploration of issues and concerns in groups or other diverse ways;
- d. to provide the time and facilities for study and real learning;
- e. to involve as many Quakers of all ages as possible in active participation; this should include activities for all ages.

Proceedings

6.23 The Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting comprise documents in advance, the Trustees' annual report and financial statements for the preceding year, the tabular statement, the report of the Agenda Planning Committee, testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends, the final minutes of Yearly Meeting and any other documents as directed by Yearly Meeting.

Yearly Meeting committees

6.24 Yearly Meeting may appoint committees or other bodies to carry out or oversee, among other things, the following functions before, during or after its sessions:

- agenda planning
- nominations
- drafting of a Yearly Meeting epistle
- examining Yearly Meeting minutes and correcting inaccuracies
- spiritual and pastoral care
- other practical arrangements for holding Yearly Meeting including issue of documents in advance.
- right conduct of sessions

Details of the names, roles, terms of reference, nomination and appointment processes, composition, membership, clerking, terms of service, and consultation and reporting arrangements of these committees and other bodies are set out in supplementary material approved by the Yearly Meeting [reference].

Yearly Meeting committees and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

6.25 Yearly Meeting appoints members of its committees and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees.

Yearly Meeting entrusts to Trustees the organisation and periodic revision of the structure of certain committees (8.06, 8.17). However, it reserves to itself decisions affecting the existence and basic functions of Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committees (8.07, 8.08, 8.11). The work they represent may not be altered without the approval of Yearly Meeting in session. In such cases any proposed amendments to our church government must, after due consideration, be forwarded to Yearly Meeting for decision (8.17).

Central Nominations Committee

6.26 Central Nominations Committee is responsible for finding names for appointments as required by Yearly Meeting and for overseeing and developing nominations procedures. It is appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of Yearly Meeting Nominating Group. Members are appointed on a rotating triennial basis. Terms of reference for the committee are agreed by Yearly Meeting.

6.27 Omitted

6.28 Omitted

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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Registered charity number 1127633

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