Testimonies

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Compiled for Yearly Meeting, London and online – 21 November 2026

Peter Armstrong

26 February 1947 – 5 October 2025

Born in Yorkshire, Peter was the eldest of three children, and is survived by his sister Gillian, his younger brother having died some years ago.

For many years Peter regularly attended Oakham Meeting. In meeting he was a strong presence, an acute listener and observer. His humour was infectious. Often when supposedly helping with the washing up he would be laughing at shared jokes.

Living life adventurously was an advice closely followed by Peter. He travelled widely, including a period in China at a Buddhist monastery, but was always modest about his varied life and achievements. Peter had an abiding interest in meditation, enjoying regular retreats.

When his health deteriorated, he became unable to attend so regularly and sorely missed the opportunity for worship that the meeting provided. First, he entered a care home and on being discharged from hospital during his final illness went to a nursing home where he died a few days later. While in hospital and realizing he was dying, becoming a member of Quakers took on an urgent need for Peter. His application for membership was approved very quickly and on being welcomed into membership he said, “words cannot express how my soul has been uplifted”.

Peter was buried on 24 October 2025 at the Willows Natural Burial Ground next to his longtime Quaker Friends Peter and Doreen Capewell, with a graveside service in the manner of Friends.

He brought to our meetings for worship a deep and concentrated silence which we valued greatly.

Signed on behalf of Leicester Area Meeting

Held 5 July 2026

David Lewis, Clerk

Jean Asher

4 October 1940 – 4 December 2024

Jean lived a life of sincerity and quiet service. She was unassuming, working diligently and efficiently behind the scenes, so that F/friends were not always aware what an important contribution she made to the ongoing life of the meeting. However, she was known for her friendliness, for the warm, inclusive, welcome she gave to those attending meeting, whether newcomers or established Friends, and for the way she kept in touch with people. Her empathy and attentive listening put the focus on others, and she tended to be quite self-contained but there was no sense of her hiding herself, merely a certain reticence.

Childhood had not been a very happy time for Jean, but she was bright and resourceful, and she managed to live a very different life as an adult. She met and married John, finding the respectful and loving relationship she needed, and she determinedly set out, with him, to give her own children a happy experience of growing up. Jean's love spread beyond her beloved husband and children to many others, both Quakers and non-Quakers, and through her work and interests, to pupils, clients, colleagues and friends.

Jean had deeply held values and beliefs, honed over time by extensive reading and spiritual reflection and she was committed to living according to these values in all areas of her life. Her professional life was important to her: she spent 25 years in secondary schools, teaching English and Latin, before re-training as a Relate Counsellor, and later supervisor, in Blackburn. She then worked there for many years both for Relate and in private practice. She was able to change many people's lives for the better, as demonstrated by the little note pressed into her hand by a former client which said, "Dear Jean, Thank you, you helped change my life. I have a new life now, Love, ---". The young woman had signed it but, of course, Jean kept her identity confidential.

As a counsellor she was insightful and kind and she was also very organised and thorough. As a supervisor she had high standards for herself and others and was not afraid to confront issues that she felt needed addressing. An

ex-supervisee remembers Jean's disapproval when she had not prepared properly for supervision! Maybe her background as a teacher was useful preparation for that. Although Jean was a serious person, she had a good sense of humour and exhibited the 'twinkle in the eye' asked for in one of the prayers she once cut out of a newsletter and put in her commonplace book. Her unexpected, wonderful, quiet sense of humour was often very helpful to others.

Jean was fascinated by local and family history and this led to service, too: teaching for The University of the Third Age (U3A), researching the Quaker heritage of the Settle area, and diligently responding to queries from those with ancestral family connections to Settle Meeting, welcoming any who chose to visit. The efficient organisation of the Meeting records is also due to Jean's careful work – a task that is typically barely noticed if done well, like some other aspects of Jean's service.

Jean's life was lived with integrity, care and love. As an ex-colleague put it, 'She had a lot of love to give and she gave it – her care for people was infectious and she brought out the best in people'. Her life, indeed, reflected the grace of God working in our flawed but beautiful world.

Signed on behalf of Craven & Keighley Area Meeting

Held 11 July 2026

David Heslop, Clerk

Ronald (Ron) Barden

12 July 1930 – 17 February 2026

Ron was born into a Jewish family in the East End of London, the youngest of seven children. Life must have been hard economically, but Ron was recognised as a bright boy who won a scholarship to a grammar school. During the Second World War, he was twice evacuated, first to a family in rural Norfolk and then to Leek in North Staffordshire. He formed strong relationships with his foster parents and kept in touch with them throughout their lives. It was in Norfolk and Staffordshire that he developed his love of football and cricket.

After the war, he returned to London, and his first job was as a clerk at Lloyds Bank until he was called up to serve in the RAF. A lifelong socialist, he had joined the Labour Party at the age of fifteen. After National Service, he wanted to pursue a political career, being elected a Borough Councillor, serving on regional and national committees, and once even standing as an MP for an unwinnable seat.

In 1955, while acting as a steward at the finals of the National Labour League of Youth speaking contest, he met Eleanor, one of the finalists. They were married twice, once in a civil ceremony at Hackney Town Hall and then in the Quaker Meeting in Southampton, where Eleanor's family were members.

Since politics was unlikely to be compatible with family life, Ron took a degree at Southampton University. He began work as a lecturer, climbing the career ladder in further education colleges. Ron, Eleanor, and their four children moved to Welwyn Garden City, where Eleanor became an active member of the Quaker meeting. The children remembered being sent, perhaps not enthusiastically, to children's meeting, after which Ron would reward them with a visit to a sweet shop.

Ron once said that although he admired what Quakers stood for, he was not, for a long time, convinced by the form of worship, but then came to

recognise that Quakers had 'got something.' He became a member in 1988, worshipping with and serving the Religious Society of Friends faithfully for the rest of his life.

In 1976, Ron was appointed principal of Northampton College, where he remained until he retired in 1995. Ron was committed to meeting the needs of the local communities and creating educational opportunities for all, regardless of age or background. He particularly wanted to encourage young people who had 'failed' at school, and was involved in setting up education and training work in prisons.

Throughout their married life, he supported Eleanor's work in building relationships across borders, hosting German children who came to England to learn English, and then setting up a travel business that took parties to visit the continent, and particularly to Russia. Out of this work grew Friends House Moscow, which she and Ron supported throughout their lives.

Ron and Eleanor were always hospitable, hosting study groups and worship sharing in their home, and held a garden party for Friends in their large garden every summer for many years. When Eleanor developed dementia, Ron cared for her with loving patience right to the end.

Once retired from education, he served as clerk, treasurer and trustee to local and area meetings in Northamptonshire. He also served for several years as area meeting registrar, reminding us from time to time that he thought we ought to have more weddings, as these were the only things he got paid for! Ron liked to do things 'right', so he always wore a suit and tie to present his report on the state of our finances. Nationally, he was for several years treasurer to Britain Yearly Meeting itself.

He was committed to the survival of many Quaker organisations and diligently looked after their often fragile finances, allowing them to continue. He acted as treasurer of many Quaker charities in a very uncomplaining way - some of them will have been a lot of work and pretty unrewarding. Some Friends found him quite formidable, particularly when they asked for funding

for projects which he considered had not been fully thought out. He was always concerned that the Society of Friends should receive value for money. Despite this, he could be very funny, and always had a wicked twinkle in his eye (often for good reason).

Signed on behalf of Northamptonshire Area Meeting

Held 19 July 2026

Rosemary Sturge, Clerk

John Lynes

8 March 1928 – 18 March 2026

John Lynes was born on 8th March 1928 in London to Charles Maurice Lynes and Edna Julia Moss. His parents were London-based Reform Jews. His ancestors had arrived in London during the eighteenth century, mostly Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe, although DNA suggests that John also had some Sephardic ancestors (Jews from Spain or Portugal). They had worked mainly in the clothing trade and were successful tailors. John's mother came from the family that started Moss Bros - John's grandfather and great uncle were the original Moss (or Moses) Brothers. John described his synagogue as politely anti-Zionist, as were his parents.

John grew up in Willesden Green. He started school in 1933. John with his brother Tony and their mother were evacuated to Newbury in Berkshire at the beginning of the war in 1939. John and Tony attended Newbury Grammer School as boarders. Their mother lived in a boarding house opposite the school, and the boys used to sneak out and visit her after school. While still at school John passed his City and Guilds Illuminating Engineering exams. He took the exam on Victory in Europe (VE) day, and as a result said that he was the last person in the entire country to find out that the war was over!

John was conscripted into the army in 1946 and served as a soldier for two years before being transferred to the reserves following completion of his full-time military service in 1948. Having left the Army, he secured a job with Falk, Stadelmann & Co. Ltd as a lighting engineer, gaining extensive experience in lighting design and photometry. That year John won the "Silver Jubilee award", a prize given annually for an author under the age of 26, for his paper "Method of Designing" which has been cited in various subsequent texts. Whilst working at the Falks firm John wrote a paper on interreflections which was published by the Illuminating Engineering Society and gained him considerable respect in his field. John's employers allowed him part-time release to complete his degree.

John refused to register when the Korean war started in June 1950. He became involved in the "World Government movement" which held that only a supranational world government could enforce peace, control weapons and resolve disputes. John at this point became a pacifist and was prepared to go to prison rather than return to the army, but the war ended before he was called up. John met Monica in 1953 at the wedding of a friend and they were married later the same year. While John was Jewish, Monica was a Scottish Presbyterian. They could not decide where to get married until a friend suggested a Quaker wedding, as "there were no priests involved and you don't have to pay!" At the time John was studying for a degree in electrical engineering at the University of London, and wanted to get married before the beginning of term since he would have to spend a lot of time studying once term started – ever the romantic! However, he continued worshipping with Quakers ever since.

John and Monica were living in Leicester when Bruce, their first adopted son, arrived (aged 12). In 1960 more young people, John and Helena, arrived. John and Monica adopted 6 children: Bruce, John, Brenda, Margaret, Steven and Peter. They also long term fostered 6 children: Jan, Andrej, Helena, Pauline, Carol and Shane. Brenda was delivered at lunchtime in January 1962 from hospital just 10 days old whilst John was at work, and by tea time Monica said, "she's staying". In 1963 Margaret arrived at a few months old.

In 1972 John secured a role as principal lecturer in the Department of Architecture at Plymouth Polytechnic in Devon and the entire family relocated from Lancashire to Plymouth. During this period John spent a number of terms working for Halifax University in Canada, where he made lifelong friends. He transferred to the University of Hull around 1985 where he worked within the department of Architecture until his retirement. During his time at Hull University, he continued his research and consultancy activities in the area of lighting and is recognised both nationally and internationally as a leader in the field. John was a prolific writer and researcher. He wrote five books and over 60 papers which appeared from 1955 onwards.

He was awarded the Bronze Medal for the Lighting Division of the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers for his published papers no fewer than six times. In 1992 he received the Lighting Division Award from the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers. He developed with others, the Hyperlight computer software programme which was widely used for many years in architectural practices and by many schools of architecture. Sadly Monica, John's beloved wife died in 1999 from a brain haemorrhage, and John moved to Hastings in 2002 to be nearer his daughters Brenda and Margaret.

Following Monica's death much of John's time was taken up with the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). In 2000, Quakers in Britain started to send observers to Palestine. John had not expected to be accepted because he was obviously old and had a Jewish background and anyway didn't have the qualifications they were asking for – but he had served a week in prison for taking part in a peace protest outside the Ministry of Defence (having refused to pay the £10 fine to which he was sentenced initially) and the CPT appointed him as a Quaker observer. He was attached as an intern in Hebron, and it was his job to provide a non-violent alternative to the continuing conflict between Palestinian civilians, Israeli soldiers and settlers in the occupied West Bank.

The CPT ethos was to take the same risks and make the same sacrifices as a soldier. He knew he may suffer imprisonment and was ready to accept the consequences of his decisions in the hope that children in the Middle East may be enabled to grow up in greater safety. They lived dangerously and had no qualms about being arrested, or intervening in situations of violence. They lived with Palestinians, sharing their lives and buying their food at the same market. They stood with Palestinians at checkpoints, or wherever they were threatened or attacked. They protected frightened Palestinian children on their way to and from school. They were sometimes physically attacked by settlers and on two occasions he had to be rescued by the Israeli army, which was embarrassing!

As he had been a university lecturer in the UK, the Quakers arranged for him to do some teaching in the Islamic University of Gaza, run by Hamas. When he left to go back to Hebron the students gave him a Hamas badge. As he was proud to point out, not every Jew has one of those! During his three months with the CPT, the World Council of Churches launched its ecumenical accompaniment programme, and asked Quakers in Britain to find volunteers from Britain and Ireland. John signed up as soon as he got back to England and was in the first Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) contingent from the UK in the West Bank.

He worked with them for six years in Hebron and in the South Hebron Hills and later in Iraqi Kurdistan until his health failed. He was asked once why he chose to put himself into a place as frightening and uncertain as Hebron. He replied "because this is all one can do".

The CPT motto, "getting in the way", was very much in keeping with his approach, projecting himself into unreasonable situations and trying to be reasonable. He felt that being an elderly bearded individual walking with a stick helped to establish respect from the Israeli soldiers, saying that there were things that a young man didn't want to be seen doing by his grandfather! John's last formal interaction with Israel was in 2011 when he was aged 83. Several "flotillas" carrying humanitarian supplies to Gaza had been boarded by the Israeli navy and prevented from landing. John decided to see what would happen if instead a group entered Tel Aviv openly on a commercial flight. Would they be admitted? It turned out that they were arrested straightaway. In Ramle Prison they launched a hunger strike but were soon deported, and their passports were endorsed "Entry Denied".

From his arrival at Hastings Meeting John became a stalwart member of Hastings Meeting and regular attender at area meeting where he modestly shared his faith and wisdom through service and ministry, always with an endearing twinkle in his eye. Although no longer able to travel overseas as a peacemaker, he continued to be involved in numerous activities on home soil, being arrested numerous times in peaceful protest. He was an enthusiastic and active member of Extinction Rebellion, continued his

campaign against the arms trade, and was passionately involved in a number of other groups, especially those campaigning for justice for Palestinians. Despite his own Jewish background and heritage, [RG2.1]John was very conscious of the suffering of the Palestinian people and sympathetic towards their situation, and was active in his support for them. John also supported the Sea of Faith movement, regularly attended the Hastings Interfaith Forum, was a member of the local United Nations Association and also Global Justice, and supported Dorothy Day's Catholic Workers movement. He continued to peacefully protest right up until his death on 18th March 2026 at the age of 98. We are humbled and challenged by his commitment to peacebuilding but glad that he found a spiritual base amongst Friends.

Signed on behalf of Sussex East Area Meeting

Held 18 October 2026

Ruth Whitelaw, Clerk

Susan (Sue) Monaghan

17 October 1935 – 30 April 2025

Sue was born to Tom and Rosamund Pyke in 1935 and grew up in Kent. During the Second World War, she and her younger sister Anne were evacuated to Canada. This experience had a profound and lasting impact. Sue loved the freedom that life in Canada gave her, as well as its lakes and scenery. However, returning to the UK in 1945, aged 9, was hard to adjust to.

Sue was educated at St. Michael's School, Limpsfield and then at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, where she studied modern languages. After a short stint at the CBI[RG3.1] in London, she moved to Garnett College, where she met – and subsequently married – John Monaghan in 1965.

They were from different backgrounds (he was the son of a Yorkshire miner) but they were drawn together by their shared intellect and love of the outdoors. He was the love of her life.

In 1974, with their two young sons David and Ben in tow, they left London for a dilapidated smallholding in Downhead, Somerset. There she built a new life for her family in idyllic surroundings. Ben's main childhood memory from this time is of Sue cycling him to Leigh on Mendip primary school on the back of her bike. She also worked at this time as a freelance interpreter for local farmers selling livestock to France.

As her sons became more independent, Sue started her second career, as a teacher of modern languages at Sunny Hill School in Bruton, and then at Millfield School in Street. She found her time at Millfield rewarding, as high-calibre colleagues engaged her intellectually in a way she hadn't recently experienced. Sue had a passion for French, both language and literature. She was usually self-deprecating about her achievements and found it hard to take compliments, but was incredibly touched a little while before her death to receive a card from a former pupil saying what an inspiring teacher she'd been.

On retirement, Sue and John put their energies into developing a splendid garden, from scratch, at their new house in Street. By the time that they left, it was well established with a pond, fruit trees, a thriving vegetable garden as well as a wild patch for orchids and other wild flowers to flourish. Home-grown produce was always on the menu for visitors.

Both Sue and John were incredibly hospitable. Sue organised parties and events, with long tables set out in the sunshine and then everyone gathered round a fire in the evening. Guests were a mixture of family, friends and foreign exchange visitors from all over the world. It gave Sue huge pleasure to see her family thriving and growing. She would often think of something that the children would like to do, such as collecting seeds or decorating the Christmas tree.

Sue was an intellectual and, not cowed by convention, took her own path in life. This included her signing up to a full-time cabinet making course. She also loved jigsaws, did T'ai Chi classes and, in her final years, took on the challenge of a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing at Strode College. Here she gained a new energy from the mental stimulus of the course and enjoyed the interaction with fellow students up to sixty years younger than her. It was obvious, at a party that she held for them all at her house a year or so into the course, how much they appreciated her.

Along with French, Sue's other passion was walking. She walked everywhere, from strolls around Street to longer hikes, some through the hills, leading a walking group for a time. It was the Camino de Santiago pilgrims' route, which she and John did various sections of over the years, that really captured her imagination. She chose the scallop, a symbol of pilgrimage, for her and John's headstone, one that can represent the idea that the journey is more important than the destination.

Sue was deeply involved in her community – with a genuine intention to contribute substance. Over the last 15 years or so, she increasingly participated in recording and protecting the cultural heritage of Street, both as a founder member of the Street Society and through her engagement

with local planning, church recording and architectural conservation. She was a library trustee and pro-active member of the local residents' association. The tapestry made for Downhead Church for the Queen's Silver Jubilee was designed by her mother and organised by Sue. Her commitment to sustainability led her to purchase a house on the Houndwood Estate, which was designed on environmental principles. After moving in she was an important voice on the residents' association.

Sue was a valued member of Street Quaker Meeting, having applied for membership after being an attender for many years. She served in many roles; as convenor of nominations, meeting librarian (where she set up the computerisation of the library catalogue and ran a reading group), as doorkeeper and in writing the 'Christian Comment' article in the local paper. The training at Woodbrooke which she undertook for the first two of those posts was brought back to meeting, feeding into her work. She also hosted a Quaker faith a practice study group at her home, providing us all with generous hospitality there. Her support for the Repair Café at the meeting house gave impetus which helped when it was being set up. For some years, too, she contributed to the debate among Quakers on assisted dying, an issue she cared deeply about.

Quaker values of truth and integrity were ones which Sue exemplified, speaking out frankly and directly in personal and political discussions. Her approach to the demands of her and John's increasing frailty was characterised by the same honesty and courage. She did all that she could to look after John at home, until his condition became too much for her to cope with. In the last year of her life, too, she confronted the stringencies of her worsening health head on, experimenting with different approaches until at last it became necessary to move into a nursing home.

Sue was a complex person, but she was kind and caring, someone who was fully engaged with – and curious about – life, the world and its inhabitants.

She lived a long and active life and will be remembered as a loving mother, aunt, granny, friend and colleague, for her intellectual pursuits, the support she gave to her community and for walking everywhere.

Signed on behalf of Mid-Somerset Area Meeting

Held 12 September 2026

Andy Hall, Clerk

John Guthrie Smithson

11 April 1930 – 10 August 2025

John Guthrie Smithson was born into a Quaker family from Halifax and therefore became a birthright Friend. John's father, Michael Satterthwaite Smithson, had joined the Friends Ambulance Service during WWI and was demobbed at Old Jordans in 1918, thus beginning a long family connection with Jordans. This early immersion in Quaker values stayed with John throughout his life.

John's father inherited ownership of a worsted textile mill, which closed in 1930 because of financial difficulties, arising in part from a refusal to manufacture khaki cloth in the First World War. His father had to sell their home in Pinner, and the family went to live in a borrowed house in the south of France. They returned to Jordans and were lent various houses whilst John's father built a house on a piece of land in Chalfont St Giles. John subsequently rebuilt this house, where Sue and he lived until their deaths.

John went to Long Dene School in Crutches Lane, Jordans, in 1936. This school, initially run by two Quaker women, was purchased by new owners in 1939 to be run as a progressive co-educational school, and John returned there as a weekly boarder when the school moved to alternative premises in Stoke Poges. John was admitted to Quaker membership as a minor in 1938 [RG4.1]together with his younger brother Anthony.

During the Second World War, the school practised a level of horticultural self-sufficiency and John drove the tractor. His interest in transportation, mechanics, agriculture and helping others, began then. John learned mechanics by example, taking new things apart, and rebuilding them, to understand how they worked. John was with his father when his father died in Jordans on the way from the Seer Green Railway Station to Chalfont St. Giles in 1944.

Upon leaving school, John decided that he wanted to be a farmer. A period of time as an apprentice in an agricultural college led John to conclude

that his main interest was in agricultural machinery, so he moved to the Hertfordshire Institute for Agricultural Engineering at Oaklands where John took advantage of any opportunity and worked many hours in the machinery laboratory. As his interest in transportation and machinery increased, John next gained a diploma from the College of Aeronautical and Automobile Engineering in Chelsea.

In 1950 Sue's mother suggested she go to a fundraising ball at a local hotel with 'the Smithson boy' as a partner, which was the start of the relationship between John and Sue. Sue was also studying in London whilst John was studying in Chelsea, and he would drive her to London on Monday and back on Friday, taking in a film on their way home.

John's educational years formed the basis for his 25 years' work abroad in Uganda, Australia, Thailand, South Korea, and Iraq between 1953 and 1977. In 1953 John got a career job in Uganda, becoming engaged to Sue by post shortly after he arrived there. In 1956 on a six months' leave from Uganda they were married in Chalfont St Giles Anglican church. John then returned to Uganda with Sue for five years.

Their two eldest children, Michael and Deborah, were born there, but John and Sue returned to England as they were unhappy about education in Uganda. At the end of the contract in Uganda, John and Sue, and their two children migrated to Australia as £10 Poms. They lived there for four years, during which time their third child, Robert, was born.

On an eighteen month 'boomerang' visit back to England, Sue decided that she did not mind where they lived, but she always wanted to have a return ticket to England, which would not have been possible if John and Sue returned to Australia, so they remained in England.

There followed many contracts for John in various parts of the world, in between which the family was centred on Chalfont St. Giles, where John's mother was living, and Jordans, where Sue's parents were living. The two older children were at a progressive co-educational boarding school in

England with a Quaker headmaster. Robert joined them just before the age of six, after Sue had home schooled him in remote upcountry Thailand.

During a four-year contract in Thailand, John and Sue became car rally champions one year due to John's driving and Sue's exceptional navigational skills. Towards the end of 1971, after being overseas for 18 years, before moving from Thailand to a new contract in South Korea in 1972, John resigned his Quaker membership, which once John and Sue settled back in Jordans in the 1980s, surprised John as he does not recall doing this. At this time John and Sue's Christian following was limited to 2 hours' round-trip visits to a missionary hospital in upcountry Thailand, which John and Sue did make with some regularity, and with a more local Korean Christian presence in South Korea, church visits were more frequent.

John's work in so many diverse cultures enabled his creativity in his chosen pragmatic field. John learned how to establish dust free machinery environments in Uganda, deal with trade unionists and get qualifications in Australia in order to put electrical wiring into his own home, and handle both the bureaucracy and the humid environment in Thailand when working on a remote upcountry experimental cotton plantation.

In South Korea, John taught at an agricultural institute, and he was proud of having designed and actioned an irrigation scheme in the very flat and overused agricultural land in Iraq. John and Sue travelled extensively in East Africa, Australia, Thailand, and South Korea, as well as other parts of Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America.

During these peripatetic years John developed his skills in mechanical and electrical engineering, which were a huge advantage to Jordans Local Quaker Meeting when he finally returned to Britain in 1977 and to live in Jordans from 1981 and attend the meeting on a regular basis with Sue.

Between 1981 and 2005 John ran his own business as an electrical contractor, using qualifications he had acquired in Australia, employing and teaching apprentices his skills. In 1989, once John realised that his Quaker membership

had lapsed, he reapplied and was reinstated along with an opening Quaker membership for Sue, who also with Quaker ancestry, realised she had been living her life by Quaker values too.

Between 1981 and 2025, John, together with his youngest son Robert, got involved with personal computing, and they became active members of the Gerrards Cross Computer Club, where John spent 4 decades experiencing the PC revolution, always turning it into practical use, and helping others. John attended regular coffee mornings with other members, even after the club itself closed, right up until his death, and he is missed by all the ex-Gerrards Cross Computer Club members, some of whom are also Quakers.

We have known John and Sue Smithson in Jordans Quaker Meeting since the 1980s. They were regular and faithful members fulfilling a variety of services to the meeting. For many years John collated the Chiltern Area Quaker Meeting yearly membership statistics, known as the tabular statement. Once this is agreed it is fed into the national statistics.

John provided an invaluable service in the maintenance of Jordans Meeting House. Both he and Sue were there several days each week, greeting and welcoming many of the visitors who came to Jordans to explore the history of the meeting house and its beautiful setting.

During the time living in Jordans and Chalfont St. Giles, John and Sue spent lots of quality time with their six grandchildren, both in England, in neighbouring Chalfont St. Peter, and in Cyprus where they owned a traditional village house in the foothills of the Troodos mountains until 2008.

After retirement aged seventy-five, between 2006 and 2020 John spent the first three years setting up a team to restore a Ransomes Thrashing Machine, similar to one he had last used 60 years earlier, at the Chiltern Open Air Museum (COAM). In 2009 John thought his work was done; however, he remained officially a member of the COAM Farming Team Volunteers visiting once a week, restoring many of their farming machines, until the Covid pandemic intervened.

At this same time John and Sue attended several Quaker meetings, area and regional as well as yearly meeting, until Sue's failing health made this impossible. The Covid pandemic also put an end to John and Sue physically coming to meeting, but we were able to see John and Sue in their home, via Zoom.

After Sue died, John was able to get out and about a bit more, and he continued to help where he felt able. He was a venerable participant in meeting, sitting in a comfortable chair. In the months before John's unexpected death, he was able to bring his 'life story' up to date and have a successful carpel tunnel surgery on his left hand.

During the week before his death, he appeared in a place of contentment, and he talked openly about not wanting his last days to be ineffective in the community, values he took from his Quaker experience. He was practical in thought and knew he would not live forever.

He was sharing stories of his life the evening he fell 'asleep'. John met all his six grandchildren and seven great grandchildren, several living close by in Chalfont St. Giles, Egham, and St. Albans, and a few further afield in Canada and New Zealand. His final conversation was about them. Thus, he was thinking lovely thoughts. His death left a gap of both his physical and spiritual presence. John was a significant member of the local meeting, missed by all.

We give thanks for the grace of God as shown in the lives of our Friends John, and his wife Sue, Smithson.

Signed on behalf of Chilterns Area Meeting

Held 30 September 2026

Catriona Troth, 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.

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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