

Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

April 2026 (online edition)

No. 439

Meetings for Worship

Every Sunday 10:15am at the Abingdon Community Support Service (Abbey Centre), Crabtree Place, off Audlett Drive.

Thursday 2nd April 7:30pm in the Garden Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street.

Woodbrooke offers online meetings for worship on Zoom at various times during week. For a timetable and the link to the Zoom room, visit <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/worship/>.

Other Forthcoming Meetings

Further information about these meetings is on the inside pages of this issue.

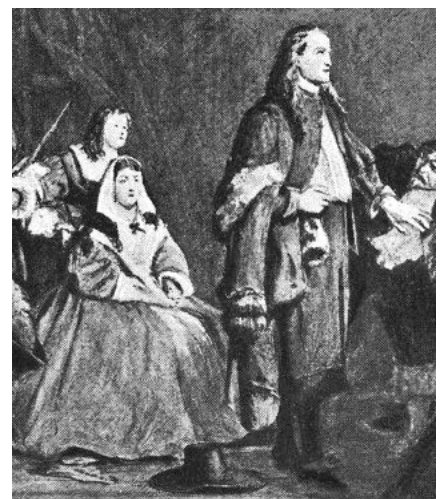
Sunday 5th April	10:15am	All-Age Meeting for Easter Sunday
Saturday 11th April	10:15—4pm	Regional Meeting, Banbury Meeting House
	10:00—2pm	Abingdon Clubs & Societies Day
Saturday 18th April	10:30—4:30pm	Listening Space, Swindon Meeting House (details in March issue)
Sunday 26th April	After MfW	Business Meeting
Saturday 6th June	1—5pm	Nurturing Children's Spirituality, Oxford Meeting House (details in March issue)

Meeting for Sufferings Comes to an End

Chris Sewell has brought to our attention a historic event which represents a 'positive and momentous change' in the Quaker Movement: the end of Meeting for Sufferings, a body that has met for 350 years. For the benefit of Friends who may be less familiar with 'Sufferings', Liz Matthews has compiled this short historical background:

Why Meeting for 'Sufferings'?

Meeting for Sufferings was founded in 1675 to support Quakers persecuted by the state — persecutions which continued despite the passing of the Act of Toleration in 1689. These 'sufferings' included confiscation of goods, fines and imprisonment for refusing to pay church tithes or take oaths (*right*), and exclusion from public office. They were recorded in the *Great Books of Sufferings*, about which more on page 2. Meeting for Sufferings put Friends' cases before Parliament and achieved some notable successes during the 18th century, including relief from the oath and a reduction in tithes. Meeting for Sufferings later went on to campaign against slavery,



support relief work, form the Peace Committee, and voice Quaker views on the opium traffic and forms of gambling.

In modern times Meeting for Sufferings functioned as 'the standing representative body entrusted with the general care of matters affecting Britain Yearly Meeting and, in the intervals between Yearly Meetings, the making of decisions and the issuing of statements in the name of Britain Yearly Meeting' (*Quaker Faith & Practice*, 7.02). In 1997 Meeting for Sufferings revived the practice of maintaining a register of Friends whose personal commitment to their faith has led them to break the law.

More information about the history of Meeting for Sufferings, its constitution and functions, can be found in Chapter 7 of *Quaker Faith & Practice* (<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/7/>).

Page 1 shows a detail from 'George Fox refusing to take the oath at Houlker Hall, A.D. 1663', a painting by John Pettie, RA, which won the RA's gold medal for historical painting in 1864.

Why has Meeting for Sufferings come to an end?

In 2024 Yearly Meeting agreed to a proposal to lay down Meeting for Sufferings and change how British Quakers meet as a Yearly Meeting, in order 'to create greater clarity and inclusiveness in how Quakers across Britain can make decisions together and follow up on those decisions. ... [T]his approach will, we hope, enable more of us to participate in spirit-led discernment, more regularly' (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/updates/yearly-meeting-update-september-2025>). Meeting for Sufferings is being merged with Yearly Meeting which will now gather four times a year (rather than once) and be open to all Quakers. The new Yearly Meeting sessions will include three short (approximately day-long) sessions and one long weekend session. Some sessions will be held outside London. Friends will be able to attend either in person or online (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-take-historic-step>).

What are *The Great Books of Sufferings*?

From the 1650s up to the 19th century the sufferings of individual Quakers were recorded in detail by hand and bound into a series of 44 volumes, now housed in the library at Friends House. The records include prosecutions in civil, criminal and church courts; imprisonments; seizures of property where fines were not paid; and other penalties for crimes, including non-attendance at church and illegal meetings as well as the refusal to take oaths or pay tithes mentioned above. The accounts of sufferings were sent to London by Quarterly Meetings around the country and compiled by the Recording Clerk.

The *Great Books* were not intended for publication, but many books and pamphlets containing accounts of persecutions were printed and circulated. Among these is *A collection of the sufferings of the people called Quakers*, a compendium by Joseph Besse, derived from the *Great Books* and other sources. Published in 1753, Besse's compendium is a fascinating resource for anyone interested in their Quaker family history. For example, in addition to one of George Fox's numerous spells in prison, page 127 of volume 1 (see page 3) records a 19-day sentence handed down to Katharine Fell, a distant ancestor of mine (unrelated to Margaret), who had her baby with her.

There is a fascinating account of the *Great Books* and related publications on the Quaker Strongrooms blog at <https://quakerstrongrooms.org/2012/06/06/quaker-sufferings-records-an-embarras-de-richeesse/>. Besse's compendium has been digitised and can be found on a number of websites, including Google Books. The Quaker Family History Society is currently building a searchable list of the entries (https://qfhs.co.uk/?page_id=974).

ANNO 1653.

GEORGE FOX, for preaching the Truth in the great Worship-house at Carlisle, after the Priest had ended his Sermon, and for witnessing a good Confession before the Magistrates and People there, was imprisoned seven Weeks, sometimes among Thieves and Murderers. G. Fox imprisoned.

Robert Withers, for asking the Priest of *Aketon* a religious Question after Sermon, was imprisoned at *Carlisle* one Month; as was *George Bewly* for accompanying him. *Robert Huntington*, for Preaching at *Carlisle*, was imprisoned three Months, and *James Noble*, for the same Cause, nine Weeks. Sundry others imprisoned.

Robert Withers, *Thomas Rawlinson*, *John Stubbs*, and *Thomas Gwin*, for declaring against false Worship at the Steeple-house in *Coldbeck*, were inhumanly treated by the rude People, one of them being knocked down, and much of their Blood spilled on the Place.

John Martin, for testifying against the Priest of *Kirkbride*, whom he met in the Fields, and calling him by his proper Name, viz. an Hireling, was committed to Prison.

ANNO 1654. *Thomas Stubbs* was concerned to go into the Steeple-house at *Deane*, where, when the Priest had done, he said, *Tbou daubest the People up with untempered Mortar*; whereupon the Priest bid his Hearers fight for the Gospel; they fell violently upon *Stubbs* and some of his Friends, tore their Clothes, and beat them cruelly. The Priest's Son in particular sorely bruised the Face of *Richard Richardson*. After which two Justices sent *Stubbs* to Prison, but conscious of the Wrong they did him, writ his *Mittimus* and *Discharge* both on one Paper; this furnished the Goaler with a Claim for Fees, under Pretence of which he kept him fourteen Weeks in Prison. T. Stubbs abused.

Peter Head, for testifying to the Truth, in the same Place, was imprisoned fourteen Weeks in a close Room among Felons in the Heat of Summer; and *John Head*, for delivering some Queries to the Priest of *Deane* at his own House, was imprisoned fourteen Weeks. *John Slee*, for reprovng a Priest at *Grisdale*, was kept a close Prisoner among Felons two Months. Also *Katharine Fell*, for asking a Priest, *whether he did witness what he spake to the People*, was kept in Prison nineteen Weeks, having a young Child sucking at her Breast. Imprisonment of P. Head and others.

An extract from Vol. 1 of Besse's compendium of sufferings.

Abingdon Quaker Matters

An All-Age Celebration of Easter: Sunday 5th April

Tim Gee writes:

The first half of the meeting will proceed as usual in the manner of unprogrammed, expectant waiting worship, rooted in stillness, out of which anyone can offer spoken ministry if inwardly moved to do so. In the meantime the children will hear the Easter story, in the children's room.

After around half an hour the children and helpers will knock, and the door will be opened to them. We will sing a song while the children offer pieces of paper to the adults with numbers on them relating to different Advices and Queries.

The children will then be invited to engage in an egg hunt around the meeting room. As they eat, further ministry will be welcome. We will close by singing another song, and sharing chocolate with adults too.

Abingdon Clubs & Societies Day: Saturday 11th April

10—2pm, Various locations in Abingdon.

As in 2025, we will have a presence at this event, giving out information and talking to people about our Meeting. Involvement in the day helps us to maintain a presence in Abingdon.

Volunteers are sought to help on our stand; please contact Jenny Carr (abingdonquakers@gmail.com) if you are free, no matter how much (or little) time you can give.

The Mayor's Civic Service will take place on the afternoon of 11th April. We are pleased to have been asked to provide a reading about Quakerism, and have chosen a passage from the Britain Yearly Meeting website. Again, this will serve to highlight our presence in Abingdon. A restriction on numbers means that attendance at the service is by invitation only.

Business Meeting: Sunday 26th April

Our next Business Meeting will take place a week earlier than customary as Yearly Meeting is being held over the first weekend in May. Please send items for the agenda to Jenny Carr (abingdonquakers@gmail.com) by Wednesday 22nd April. Thank you.

'Becoming Friends'

The Spiritual and Pastoral Care group is delighted with the interest shown in the 'Becoming Friends' discussion group. We are trying to decide how we can match the time and day to the availability of as many of you as possible and will let you know when and where the discussions will start — it will be soon.

Monthly Appeal: Abingdon Carousel

From Anita Wickens:

Abingdon Carousel Family Centre is a charity running services for children and young families in the former South Abingdon Children's Centre on Caldecott Chase. It provides many forms of support and early learning for young families in Abingdon and surrounding area. The help comes in many forms, from weekly 'drop-in and play' sessions for babies and children up to four years, together with their parents or carers, to one-to-one support in matters such as children's play, speech and language delay, breastfeeding, behaviour issues and family pressures like finance, parenting and family relationships. Many parents find that attending the play sessions is a life-saver.

In addition to being able to call on staff for help and support, the community of parents themselves acts as a safety net of support through the trials and tribulations of family life. This mutual support may be enough to help small issues from escalating to the point of crisis

Because the surrounding area comprises many low-income families, there is a strong emphasis on helping families to survive on low budgets. The Centre regularly provides emergency food, nappies and clothing. Staff are frequently the conduit for grants to families in acute financial need given by Oxford Friends' Action on Poverty.



You can donate in these ways:

- **Cash** when the appeal is made after Meeting for Worship. ‘Generic’ Gift Aid forms should be available if you are a UK taxpayer.
- **Online** at <https://abingdoncarousel.org.uk/fundraise/>.

For further information, visit <https://www.abingdoncarousel.org.uk/> or <https://www.facebook.com/abingdoncarousel>.

Thank you.

Abingdon Carousel is a Registered Charity no. 1177322.

Results of Appeals January–March 2026

The amounts below represent the cash collected when the appeals were made at Meeting for Worship. Individual Friends may have donated directly to the charities.

January: St Ethelwold’s	£125
February: Escaping Victimhood	£175
March: Street Talk	£195

If You Use CAF Vouchers...

From Liz Matthews, Treasurer:

If you contribute to Abingdon Meeting by CAF voucher (also known as a charity cheque), please note that CAF will discontinue this method of giving from 1st August. After that date you can continue to support us through your CAF account by donating online (at <https://www.cafonline.org>), or by calling CAF Customer Services on 03000 123 000.

If you wish to use a CAF voucher to contribute to Abingdon Meeting in 2026, please make sure that I receive it before 30th April. Thank you.

Around the Area and Region, and Beyond

Regional Meeting: ‘Peace Building in a Time of Conflict’

Saturday 11th April 10:15–4pm, Banbury Meeting House and online.

Join us for a day of talks and discussions. The featured speakers are Caroline Crosfield, who will share her experience of being an Ecumenical Accompanier with EAPPI in Gaza, and John Crosfield, who will talk about the work of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA). Banbury Friends feel that the presentations should be suitable for young people from age 11.

Tea and coffee will be provided, but please bring your own lunch.

if you plan to attend, whether in person or online, please email banbury@banburyveshamquakers.org.uk.



Yearly Meeting

Friday 1st May—Monday 4th May, Friends House.

A reminder that advance registration for Yearly Meeting is required; the closing date is 27th April. Please allow a week for your booking to be processed.

Online preparation sessions will run from 13th—17th April.

Local Events of Quaker Interest

Abingdon Peace Group

Protest at Lakenheath: Saturday 4th April

RAF Lakenheath is the largest air base in Britain operated exclusively by the US Air Force. On Easter Saturday a coach is going to Lakenheath (and coming back the same day) to protest against the stationing of US-controlled nuclear weapons on British soil for the first time in over a decade. If you would like to go, please contact Sally Reynolds.

Protest at RAF Fairford: Saturday 11th April

The Fairfield air base is being used for huge US Air Force bombers (including B-1s and B-52s) to take off to bomb Iran. The protest on 11th April clashes with Regional Meeting and Clubs & Societies Day. If you would like to come on the next rally after 11th April, contact Sally.

Abingdon Carbon Cutters: Creating Ponds for Wildlife

Wednesday 15th April 7:30pm, Abingdon Baptist Church, 35 Ock Street.

This month's speaker is Jeremy Biggs, co-founder of the charity Freshwater Habitats Trust (<https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/>). Jeremy will talk about what makes ponds special as freshwater habitats and how we can go about creating them in different situations, including in gardens.

Right: A pond on Cumnor Hurst in early spring.



Among Abingdon Friends

Poem of the Month

Roger Baker set the Poetry Group something of a challenge when he suggested 'incompetence' as the theme of our meeting in March. Nevertheless, as usual we came up with a variety of interpretations, including incompetence in sport, love, military strategy, driving, social skills and even poetic ability (epitomised in the incomparable doggerel of William McGonagall's 'The Tay Bridge Disaster'). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, incompetent political leadership features in our Poem of

the Month by the American poet Warren Bonham. The epigraph by Bertrand Russell rings particularly true in current times.

Good Intentions

'One of the painful things about our time is that those who feel certainty are stupid, and those with any imagination and understanding are filled with doubt and indecision.' —Bertrand Russell

The highway to our current hell
was paved by those who all meant well.
They sit on high, self-satisfied,
and marvel at how hard they tried,
declaring they did all they could
to bring about what they thought good.

They sit atop the highest peak,
with pity for the unwashed weak,
and sip their wine while they behold
the faceless human clay they mold
through theories thought in their think tanks,
still puzzled when not one says 'Thanks.'

Despite their effort and intent,
and all our money that they spent,
we scratch and claw to make ends meet
but more and more meet with defeat.
We're isolated and afraid,
And vaguely sense we've been betrayed.

The very ones who are most sure
that they are selfless, wise, and pure,
do not possess the common sense
to see their own incompetence.
But if we'll look, the wise stand out,
they are the ones who have self-doubt.

They doubt their own ability
to know what's good for you and me.
But even when they know what's good,
since they have sense, it's understood
that things may turn out bad of course,
when good is done by using force.

So, when someone with good intent
inside our bloated government
makes changes that have vast extent,
with money that will be misspent,
through force that could be violent,
we know they'll never make a dent.

Warren Bonham

News of Friends

On Sunday 8th March we greeted the newest member of our Meeting: **Flossie**, daughter of Joe and Anna Wheeler and little sister to Edith. She remained awake in Judith's arms throughout Children's Meeting and slept through the final minutes of the adults' Meeting for Worship in perfect peace.

Tim Gee was part of a Quaker delegation attending the enthronement of the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dame Sarah Mullally, on 26th March. He had the honour of presenting her with a copy of Margaret Fell's *Women Speaking Justified*, recently published in a modern English version. As Tim notes in a blog post on the Quakers in Britain website,

'...the historic appointment of the first ever woman to serve as Archbishop of Canterbury has been welcomed by both Quakers in Britain and [...] Friends World Committee for Consultation. ... I don't know Sarah Mullally the person, although I hope that in the course of our roles I will get the opportunity to do so. I do realise however, the symbolism of the moment, and how it relates to the wider Christian body. And when any in the body is honoured, I rejoice also' (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/why-quakers-are-celebrating-the-first-female-archbishop-of-canterbury>).

Miscellany

'Live Your Truth'

Chris Sewell writes:

I recently came across the following affirmation from an American life coach, Steve Maraboli. It seems to capture for me at least, the essence of how I would like to live my life as a Quaker:

Live Your Truth

Live your truth.

Express your love.

Share your enthusiasm.

Take action towards your dreams.

Walk your talk.

Dance and sing to your music.

Embrace your blessings.

Make today worth remembering.

Steve Maraboli

I hope others may find in it the inspiration that I have drawn from it.

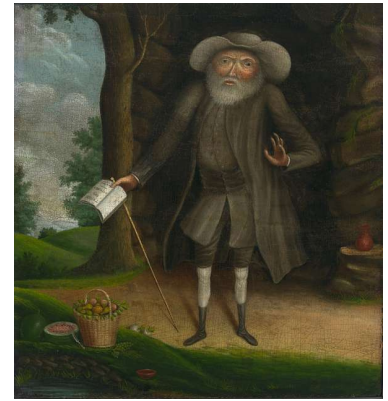
'Becoming Benjamin Lay': A New Documentary Film

Friday 17th April 4:30—6pm, Benjamin Lay Suite, Friends House.

Abolitionist, Quaker, sailor and revolutionary, Benjamin Lay (1682—1759) was born in Essex and later moved to the sugar plantations of Barbados and the British territory that was to become the USA. On 17th April Marcus Rediker, the author of a recent biography of Lay, will introduce a new documentary film about this remarkable man.

Actor Mark Povinelli embodies the visionary Lay, challenging us to live with courage and conviction in dark times. The film poses the question 'What kind of resistance is within you and how can you use it to take action?'

The showing is free and there is no need to book. For further details, visit <https://www.quaker.org.uk/events/becoming-benjamin-lay>.



Right: A portrait of Benjamin Lay by William Williams, from the National Portrait Gallery, Washington DC.

Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: April Rota

5th	Judy	Laura
12th	Chris	Eryl
19th	Rosie	Sally (Richard on standby)
26th	Anne	Auriel

Next Month...

Please send your contributions for the May issue (in words and/or pictures) to the editors by **Saturday 25th April**.



Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting

<https://abingdonquakers.org.uk> | <https://www.facebook.com/AbingdonQuakers/>

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