

Meeting for Sufferings

HISTORY

- 7.01 The yearly meeting's local organisation was settled in the years 1667-9. The 1670s saw the development of central organisation. Apart from Yearly Meeting (1668), three bodies deserve special mention – the Six Weeks Meeting (1671), Morning Meeting (1673) and Meeting for Sufferings (1675). All were basically meetings of London Friends; all, to a greater or less extent, undertook national responsibilities. The Six Weeks Meeting was the most metropolitan of the three, though even it engaged on occasion in such national business as the wording of the marriage certificate. The Morning Meeting may have had its origin in the 'meeting of ancient Friends' said to have started about 1656 or the general meeting of ministering Friends in and about the city, established in 1661. It comprised men 'publick' (or ministering) Friends in and about the city, and when, later, elders were appointed, men elders became eligible for membership of the Morning Meeting, which met each Monday.

It was the Morning Meeting which took the initiative in calling a conference in October 1675 to consider what steps could be taken to secure redress from sufferings. At that meeting it was agreed 'that certaine friends of this City be heere nominated to keep a Constant Meeting about Sufferings 4 times a year, with the day and time of each meeting here fixed and settled'. Twelve Friends, two from each of the London monthly meetings, were then listed with 'as many as are free of the Second dayes morning meeting of publick Friends to meet together as aforesaid', and that 'at least one friend of each County be appointed by the quarterly meeting thereof to be in readiness to reaire to any of the same meetings at this City, at such times as their urgent occasions or sufferings shall require'. The constitution of Meeting for Sufferings agreed by Yearly Meeting 1702 was set forth as: 'Publick Friends and such that are appointed or approved by the severall Quarterly Meetings of the Countyes & other

History

Countrys that Correspond with this meeting in all Places, and are entred as such in the Correspondent Book.’

The full Meeting for Sufferings was to meet at the beginning of each law term and one quarter of the membership was to meet weekly (each Friday) until the next full meeting. The minutes begin on 22 June 1676. At the outset some eight to ten Friends attended the weekly meetings and the speed with which, backed by information from the quarterly meeting correspondents, the meeting was able to put Friends’ case to good effect before members of both Houses of Parliament is indeed impressive. The meeting was not restricted to the efforts to obtain redress in particular ‘Cases of Suffering’ (though this was the first item in the minutes until about 1750). Yearly Meeting entrusted it with the task of trying to obtain relief from the oath, in which it was successful under the Affirmation Acts of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Yearly Meeting likewise asked it to try to secure a reduction of the burden suffered under tithes, which the meeting attempted by the promotion of successive Quakers Tithes Bills in the 1730s. It was the same closely-knit relationship of county quarterly meeting correspondents and London members of Meeting for Sufferings that enabled Friends to campaign with such success in the movement towards the abolition of the slave trade. Meeting for Sufferings, meeting weekly (as it continued to do until 1798), was able with great effect to carry out Yearly Meeting’s instructions. So swift and smooth had its organisation become that it would be tempting to describe it as highly efficient parliamentary lobbying. Although it was primarily a London body its effective correspondent system enabled it to speak with an authoritative national voice.

The nineteenth century saw a steady increase in the work of Meeting for Sufferings and a corresponding growth of its committees. The Parliamentary Committee had existed from the early eighteenth century. The Slave Trade Committee of 1783-92 was followed by other and more permanent committees – the 1817 Minden & Pymont Committee became the Continental Committee, serving for over 100 years as a link between Friends in Great Britain and small groups on the continent of Europe, in Australasia, in Calcutta, southern Africa and other places; the administrative committees charged with the care of the premises and with printing were supplemented by others responsible for the library and for finance;

7: Meeting for Sufferings

other committees took up particular concerns of Friends – several undertook successive efforts at relief work, an anti-slavery committee was re-established, in 1888 the Peace Committee was formed, and subsequent committees were set up to express Friends' views on the opium traffic and on betting and gambling.

Alongside this steadily widening stream of interests, the constitution of the meeting was changing. The era of railway travel made it increasingly easy for Friends to attend, and the system of London and country correspondents gave place to that of quarterly meeting representatives. This was reflected in revised constitutions of 1856 and 1883. In 1884 the meeting had an appointed membership of 98 with representatives from all but six quarterly meetings. In 1898 (following a decision of Yearly Meeting 1896) the first women Friends took their seats in Meeting for Sufferings. Anna Littleboy, one of those then appointed, recalled thirty years later that 'while kindly and courteously received, it was evident that the presence of women was not exactly welcomed by most of the older members, and the clerk impressed upon them that the meeting was for the conduct of business and not for speeches'.

Perhaps a more drastic change than the admission of women Friends was the laying down in 1901 of the Morning Meeting and the transference of its functions to Meeting for Sufferings. Henceforward the consideration of personal concerns for service overseas and the welcoming of travelling Friends from other yearly meetings was added to already increasing business. Preoccupation with relief work, and still greater growth of the range of Friends' concern added to the length of agenda. The days of the meeting which began at 11 o'clock and was over by a late lunch-time had passed.

The twentieth century therefore witnessed a steady trend of delegation of routine matters to subcommittees, but it also saw a gradual growth in the meeting's function in drawing together and relating to one another the different strands in the yearly meeting's life and service. This process was helped as some of the nineteenth-century 'independent associations' (the Friends Foreign Mission Association and the Friends Tract Association for example) became or were merged with official committees of the yearly meeting, gradually accepting the responsibilities and discipline that this

History

involved. It also became increasingly clear that the distinction between committees of Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings had outlived its usefulness, and Special Yearly Meeting 1965 agreed that all standing committees should be appointed by Meeting for Sufferings which, in periodic review of their work, would be enabled 'to become more sensitive to the insights of the committees and thus ... promote that knowledge and understanding by means of which both the meeting and the committees should be able more effectively to enter into and to discharge their responsibilities'.

The additional tasks laid on Meeting for Sufferings as 'a central body which can act on behalf of the Society between Yearly Meetings' necessitated, in the words of Special Yearly Meeting 1965, that 'such a body must be representative of Friends both geographically and as to diversity of our membership'. This led to representation from monthly meetings rather than quarterly meetings, to three-year appointments rather than annual, to a change in the day of meeting from Friday to Saturday and, in 1974, to the withdrawal of the automatic right of elders to attend. In furtherance of 'the essential unity of the work undertaken in the name of the Yearly Meeting', staff employed by the yearly meeting and by seven separate employing committees were unified and became employees of Meeting for Sufferings. The anomaly remained that while the yearly meeting's essential central services were funded by means of a 'quota' contributed by monthly meetings, standing committees were issuing separate financial appeals which had the effect of competing one with another. The financing of all the central work was unified between 1986 and 1988, placing further responsibility on Meeting for Sufferings for the testing of concern and for the allocation of available resources to the wide variety of religious service undertaken in the name of the yearly meeting.

In 1997 Meeting for Sufferings revived the practice of maintaining a register of Friends before the courts or imprisoned for matters of conscience.

Thus, albeit in different circumstances, Meeting for Sufferings attempts to fulfil its functions as defined by Yearly Meeting 1833: 'A standing committee of this meeting ... entrusted with a general care of whatever may arise during the intervals of this meeting, affecting our religious society and requiring immediate attention'.

7: Meeting for Sufferings

FUNCTIONS

7.02 Meeting for Sufferings is 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. Within our church government it exercises discernment on priorities and receives regular interim reports for information and consultation on the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees' work. It has a part to play in developing a visionary and prophetic role for the whole yearly meeting and in fostering communication throughout the yearly meeting.

The functions of Meeting for Sufferings are:

- a. to set the priorities for the centrally managed work in its long term plan which would interpret the wishes of the Yearly Meeting and the concerns of the area meetings, taking into account its knowledge of the detailed aspirations and plans of the central and other standing committees, the advice of the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and the funds available;
- b. to issue public statements in the name of Britain Yearly Meeting (3.27);
- c. to receive regular interim reports for information and consultation on the work of the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (8.03);
- d. to receive the Britain Yearly Meeting *Trustees' annual report & accounts* for information, as forwarded by the Trustees to Yearly Meeting (8.03);
- e. to make a report on its own activities to Yearly Meeting each year;
- f. to determine the dates of Yearly Meeting and where it will be held, on the recommendation of the Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee (6.16); it may summon a Special Yearly Meeting should occasion arise;
- g. to deliberate on how best to support the spiritual life of the yearly meeting and to further the development of its visionary and prophetic role;

Functions

- h. to keep under review and to test as appropriate the existing and new concerns referred to it by area meetings and others (4.19, 4.20, 13.13);
- i. to foster communication throughout the yearly meeting;
- j. to receive minutes from area meetings and, when thought appropriate, pass them to Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and the central or other standing committees for attention;
- k. to make appropriate entries in the prison and court register (7.01);
- l. to appoint representatives to attend other Yearly Meetings as thought fit;
- m. to receive information about changes in the composition or status of general meetings and gatherings (5.07);
- n. to make changes in the composition of area meetings (4.12);
- o. to give assistance to area meetings in the amicable settlement of disputes (4.23);
- p. to hear appeals against area meeting decisions (4.25-4.26);
- q. to give guidance on policy matters referred to it by the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees from time to time;
- r. to authorise action and minutes as required under other sections of *Quaker faith & practice*;
- s. to set up an Arrangements Group and support and working groups to assist its own work as it sees fit.

7.03 The Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees shall furnish Yearly Meeting with annual reports on their work and the work of the central and other standing committees. They shall keep Meeting for Sufferings informed about their work by providing regular interim reports for information and consultation. The Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and the central and other standing committees are reminded that they should consult with Meeting for Sufferings and have regard for its guidance in any of the following circumstances:

- a. when proposing to enter upon some major new field of service, or to give up some significant long-term project;
- b. when proposing to make some new pronouncement or envisaging a new relationship which involves some important question of principle for Britain Yearly Meeting;
- c. when considering major appeals or commitments;

7: Meeting for Sufferings

- d. when it seems desirable to share with Friends the interpretation of some urgent need or of some unusually significant piece of service;
- e. when some concern impinges on the work of other committees or aspects of the yearly meeting's wider work.

7.04 Area meetings, General Meeting for Scotland, the Meeting of Friends in Wales, Six Weeks Meeting, Young Friends General Meeting, the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and the standing committees appointed by Yearly Meeting or Meeting for Sufferings may communicate with Meeting for Sufferings by minute signed by or on behalf of their clerk. Such meetings or committees may request that Friends other than members of Meeting for Sufferings be allowed to speak to such minutes.

CONSTITUTION

7.05 Meeting for Sufferings comprises the following:

- a. about 170 Friends appointed by the Yearly Meeting on the nomination of area meetings (7.07), in accordance with the schedule provided (7.06), serving for triennial periods from Yearly Meetings 2006, 2009, etc, with service normally limited to six years (3.23);
- b. Friends appointed by the Yearly Meeting on the nomination of certain standing committees appointed by Meeting for Sufferings (7.08), being officers or other named representatives, in accordance with the following schedule:

Quaker Communications Central Committee (8.08)	2
Quaker Finance & Property Central Committee (8.09) (the clerk and one other)	2
Quaker Life Central Committee (8.10)	2
Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee (8.11)	2
Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (8.16, 9.13)	1
Quaker World Relations Committee (8.17, 9.06)	1

Constitution

- c. two representatives appointed by the Yearly Meeting on the nomination of Young Friends General Meeting (5.09), being officers or others able to speak in its name;
- d. up to two representatives each appointed by the Yearly Meeting on the nomination of General Meeting for Scotland (5.03) and Meeting of Friends in Wales (5.04-5.05), subject to review in due course;
- e. the clerk and assistant clerk of Meeting for Sufferings, any previous clerk and assistant clerk of the meeting during the remainder of the triennial period in which their service ends, the clerk of Yearly Meeting, the clerk of the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (8.03), all other Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, the clerk of the Central Nominations Committee (6.21), and any members of the Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group whose membership of the meeting would otherwise have ended, ex officio;
- f. up to ten Friends co-opted by the meeting itself (7.09), the appointments ending at the close of each triennial period;

with the Recording Clerk, the Assistant Recording Clerk, and all members of the Management Meeting (8.21), ex officio.

In case of vacancy by death, release or resignation under a, b, c or d above, the nominating body may forward the name of a Friend to serve for the remainder of the triennial period to Meeting for Sufferings which may make an interim appointment up to the next Yearly Meeting which then can make an appointment to fill the vacancy.

Meeting for Sufferings shall regularly inform the Yearly Meeting of all changes in its membership under e and f above.

Permission for the attendance of other Friends at a particular meeting may be given at the discretion of the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings.

7: Meeting for Sufferings

Area meeting representatives

- 7.06 Each area meeting may make two nominations from its membership for appointment to Meeting for Sufferings (4.17). Additional nominations may be made by larger area meetings in accordance with a schedule approved by the Yearly Meeting one year before each triennial appointment (7.05.a), modified as necessary by interim decisions necessitated by the division or amalgamation of area meetings. The schedule shall provide for one additional representative for every 300 members or part thereof in excess of 300.

Advice to area meetings as to nominations

- 7.07 In nominating Friends to serve on Meeting for Sufferings, area meetings are reminded of the variety and weight of the business which comes before that meeting, which must have the spiritual authority to speak in the name of Quakers in Britain.

A responsible sharing in the exercise of the meeting is essential. Britain Yearly Meeting requires Friends to serve on its behalf who are diligent within their own areas in the attendance of meetings both for worship and for church affairs, and able if occasion arises sensitively to interpret the views and judgment of their own area meetings to Meeting for Sufferings.

More important, however, is the duty of members to the meeting itself; if it is to reach right judgments it must be served by Friends of spiritual maturity and with a good grasp of our testimonies and structures.

Area meetings are therefore encouraged to nominate representatives who are well versed in Friends' business methods through participation at local level. It is also important that sufficient numbers of representatives are able and willing to act as trustees of Britain Yearly Meeting if asked to serve in that capacity. In making nominations, area meetings should bear in mind the need to balance experience and continuity with the value of fresh insight and wider involvement of the membership and the importance of reporting

Constitution

back as part of the communication between Meeting for Sufferings and area meetings (4.17).

Area meetings should bear in mind minute 27 of Yearly Meeting 2000 concerning the service of former members of staff: ‘that care be taken to ensure that adequate time has elapsed between the ending of their employed service and the commencement of committee service, particularly where the work of the committee is directly related to their former work. We understand that “adequate time” should normally mean a minimum of one year, or longer in the case of Friends whose work was closely related to that of the committee concerned.’ The Yearly Meeting commended this policy as good practice to area meetings in respect of their nominations to serve on Meeting for Sufferings.

Committee representatives

- 7.08 In order that the meeting may have immediately available to it authoritative information about the thinking or action of any of its principal committees which may appear to have a bearing on any subject under consideration, Yearly Meeting appoints representatives of certain standing committees, on the nomination of those committees, in accordance with the schedule provided (7.05.b). These committees are asked to ensure that there is a regular attendance of their representatives.

The representation of the Quaker Finance & Property Central Committee comprises its clerk and one other in recognition of the role of the clerk as Yearly Meeting Treasurer in relation to the centrally managed work as a whole.

Co-options

- 7.09 To secure or to retain the service of able and knowledgeable Friends, without disturbing local arrangements for selecting representatives, Meeting for Sufferings is empowered to co-opt up to ten Friends (7.05.f).

7: Meeting for Sufferings

Time of meeting

- 7.10 Meeting for Sufferings shall normally be held on the first Saturday of a month. It meets as often each year as the business requires. The clerk shall have the power to call a special meeting and at least seven days' notice shall be given to all members of the meeting.

Clerks

- 7.11 Meeting for Sufferings shall annually appoint Friends to serve as clerk and assistant clerk on the nomination of the Committee on Clerks (6.19).