

Notes from Meeting for Sufferings, 7th March 2026

First, I'd like to say that I wasn't able to attend in person, being unwell, though I had booked to do this. The recording clerk's office was kind enough to send me the Zoom link at short notice, so I attended online. This meant I missed the final tea and, no doubt, several conversations with Friends I had met previously at Sufferings.

Friends met on 7th March 2026, at Friends House and online, for what would be the final Meeting for Sufferings. During the whole of the business, there was also a quiet awareness that this long-standing meeting, rooted in Quaker history for some 350 years, was drawing to a close. This gave a reflective quality to our time together.

At the outset of the Meeting the troubling news was shared that, just days earlier, Westminster Quaker Meeting House had been raided by police, and several young nonviolent activists arrested. We heard that those involved had been gathering for training in nonviolent direct action. Along with other recent developments, this prompted deep concern about increasing restrictions on the right to peaceful protest. Throughout the day, this concern resurfaced in different ways, reminding us how closely our witness is tied to the freedoms that allow it to be lived out.

Court and Prison Register

Meeting for Sufferings recorded in the Court and Prison Register the case of a Friend arrested in connection with protest relating to the proscription of Palestine Action.

We also heard from Sussex West Area Meeting about the difficult decision to withdraw a newsletter article for fear of legal consequences, causing distress and raising further questions about freedom of expression. The meeting shared these concerns, recognising the challenge of remaining faithful in a changing legal and political landscape.

Governance in Wales

We heard about the establishment of a new single charity in Wales and the Marches, known as Cymar, bringing together several existing bodies into a unified structure grounded in shared values and guided by the Spirit. This marks an important step in simplifying and strengthening Quaker structures in the region.

Young Friends' General Meeting

We noted a change of name for **Young Friends General Meeting**, which will become the **General Meeting of Young Friends in Britain**. This change reflects a desire to speak plainly about identity while retaining a strong connection to the wider Quaker community.

Yearly Meeting Agenda

The agenda for Yearly Meeting in May 2026 will take up questions of unity, belonging, and the peaceful resolution of conflict. As responsibilities shift following the laying down of Meeting for Sufferings, Yearly Meeting will take on an increasingly central role in holding and guiding the work of the Society.

Peacebuilding in Britain

A significant portion of the day was given to hearing from the Peacebuilding in Britain team. Friends learned about work taking place across communities to address conflict through accompaniment, listening, and practical support. We were reminded of the

growing challenges posed by political polarisation, misinformation, and economic inequality, all of which can deepen division. In response, Friends reflected on how love and nonviolence might guide our actions, both as individuals and as communities. There was a strong sense that this work speaks directly to the heart of Quaker witness today.

Reports from Committees

We also received reports from committees and trustees, including the endorsement of new strategic priorities for centrally managed work. These will help shape the direction of Britain Yearly Meeting in the coming years, particularly as structures evolve. Friends noted both the opportunities and the pressures facing the Society, including financial constraints and the need to sustain long-term service in key areas such as interfaith relations.

Closing Reflections

As the meeting drew to a close, there was space to acknowledge the significance of this final session. Over centuries, Meeting for Sufferings has provided a place where Friends could gather in worship to discern the life and witness of the Society. While its role now passes into new forms, particularly through Yearly Meeting, there was a shared sense of gratitude for all that has been, and a quiet trust in what is to come.

Friends left holding both the challenges of the present moment and the continuing work of the Spirit, which guides and sustains our community in changing times.

Personally, I don't feel that my service in this regard has finished. There will be an Area Meeting representative appointed to the Continuing Yearly Meeting to ensure communication and continuity. I would be very happy to continue in this new role.

Ian Chandler

18-03-2026