

**West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**

Registered Charity Number 1134534



**Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of
Friends in Britain**

Annual report of the Trustees for 2011

**Presented with the accounts for the year ended 31st
December 2011 at Area Meeting in Bath on 10th June 2012**

Annual Report of the Trustees for 2011

Public benefit

Within the Area Meeting, Trustees work to ensure that income and property are used to further the Area Meeting's object. This work includes:

- Strengthening the life and witness of Quaker Meetings in the region of the Area Meeting and beyond
- Spreading the message of Quakers, interpreting and developing the thought and practice of the Society
- Undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad
- Supporting concerns that Quaker meetings within the Area Meeting or beyond have adopted or agreed to support
- Providing for the pastoral care of individual Members and Attenders including assistance to those in need and for education
- Maintaining and developing our Quaker Meeting Houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world
- Administering and maintaining the organisation of the Area Meeting and contributing to the support of Britain Yearly Meeting

Trustees in post in January 2011

Judith Eversley	Bath (Trustee)
Nicolas Francis	Bradford-on-Avon (Trustee)
Gordon Whittle	Chippenham (Trustee)
Debbie Nightingale	Chippenham (Deputy)
Jean Thomson	Devizes (Trustee)
Frank Bonner	Frome (Trustee)
	Trowbridge was not represented at the start of the year

People

Frank Bonner resigned as Clerk and Frome Trustee on 2nd February, 2011

Nick Francis and Judith Eversley were appointed co-Clerks to serve for the rest of 2011 at Area Meeting, 20th March, 2011

Margaret Williams was appointed Frome Trustee at Area Meeting 5th June 2011 to serve for three years from that date.

Sally Harris became Bath Deputy 2 October 2011

Chris Pollock was appointed Trowbridge Trustee and Area Meeting Treasurer at Area Meeting on 20th March 2011

Nick Francis came to the end of his service as a Trustee at the end of 2011.

Governance & Finance

During the year, North Somerset and Wiltshire Area Meeting divided to form North Somerset Area Meeting and West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting. WWESAM retained the former AM's Charity Registration number. We revised our Governing Document to take account of the change of name and area covered and continued to update the Reference Documents on which we base the operation of the Area Meeting Trustee body, the Finance & Property (F&P) Committee.

Our financial situation is comfortable at present, though we are aware that this is based partly on receipt of legacies, a source of income which is not predictable or guaranteed, and that we will not know until later in 2012 whether Schedule income in the new AM is adequate to meet our regular needs. We shall need to return to the possibility of Incorporation as a way of providing protection for Area Meeting cash assets and possibly limiting Trustee liability.

As agreed, Area Meeting insurance policies have been moved to a new broker, and Local Meetings have reviewed their contents cover; those Meetings with premises have reviewed their cover for the theft of exterior metal e.g. roofing lead.

Bath

This has been a year of on-going work to improve our Meeting House, welcoming and supporting new attenders, continuing learning opportunities and exploring how we engage with the wider community.

We are delighted that a regular Children's Meeting has been reintroduced on the first Sunday of the month, and we are pleased that the shared organisation of our Wednesday morning Meeting for Worship works well. The Poetry group, Mount Haviland discussion group, Friendly Bible Study Group and Friends Fellowship of Healing continue to meet regularly, and a new Book Group has just started. Elders have organised a number of opportunities for learning including a Listening Group, which provided an opportunity for Friends to explore examples of 'centering prayer' from Patricia Loring's book *Listening Spirituality*, and Meetings for Learning (run concurrently with Meeting for Worship) on The Roots of Quakerism and Spoken Ministry. We had an evening of Quaker poetry with a young American Friend, Sarah Katreen Hoggatt who introduced *Spirit Rising*, an anthology of writing and visual art from young Quakers round the world.

We continue to welcome and support attenders new to Quakers. On Sunday mornings we now put up a photo and name board showing members of the Meeting so that people are encouraged to learn each other's names and open up to conversation. The *Becoming Friends* initiative is working well with a number of Friends acting as Companions. In the Spring we held an 'Explorations' workshop. Two facilitators came from Quaker Life to help us explore the hopes for the Meeting out of which came three decisions:

- a) to focus on how our Meeting could relate more to the wider community
- b) to set up an ambience group so that Friends could share ideas for improving the appearance of the Meeting House;
- c) to organise a Meeting for Learning focusing on the language used in spoken ministry.

In response to a) the Meeting then held a further facilitated session exploring how we could contribute to 'nurturing our local community' which was also preparation for Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering. We explored all the different ways in which Friends are personally involved in a wide range of work in the community and agreed that the best way we could contribute as a Quaker community would be to explore and raise awareness of the spiritual basis of sustainability, and also ensure that the Meeting House is available for groups in the city working for sustainability, social justice and peace. In response to b), an Ambience Group has been set up which meets regularly and has produced some very good ideas for improving the Meeting House. In response to c), a Meeting for Learning was held in October on 'Spoken Ministry'.

Bath Friends have been active in developing the New Area Meeting and have welcomed the changes that have occurred during the year at an Area level. We have continued to support and play an active part in the Living Witness Project and have supported local Friends attending the conference on economic and social justice and one Friend who travelled to Palestine to join in the olive harvest.

We organised a fund-raising concert for Quaker Peace Network West Africa, for which we feel a special connection as their administrative office is in Bath. We have had two further nature walks and continue to ensure that the Quaker Burial Ground is accessible and used. We are currently exploring the possibility of it becoming a member of the *Quiet Garden* movement.

Our large historic Meeting House is now managed by the Ethical Property Company which has been active in promoting the building as a venue for meetings and classes; usage and income have increased significantly in 2011, despite problems with our heating. Over the winter we had a long let to Bath & North East Somerset Council to house the information centre for the 'Britain from the Air' street exhibition; the Council has now agreed to take on a further tenancy for up to 3 years to use the large upper room as an exhibition space to welcome visitors to Bath, with one of the basement rooms being used as an education room. We had been in discussion with the Genesis Project about offering a long-term home for its administrative office and training initiatives, but sadly Genesis pulled out when offered better premises elsewhere. The Upper Room has been redecorated and the downstairs toilets have been upgraded. We have recently (after a long wait!)

been granted planning permission to provide disabled access from York Street into the building, to refurbish the disabled-access toilet, provide a new kitchen and install new central heating. We expect these works to begin in the early months of 2012. In the meantime we continue with temporary heating and plenty of rugs for Friends to use in these winter months. In our maintenance of the building, encouraged and advised by the Ethical Property Company, we are 'greening' the Meeting House, including obtaining grants from QPSW and Western Power Distribution for improving energy efficiency, for example fitting sensors to corridor and lobby lights and exchanging older compact fluorescent bulbs for lower-energy LED bulbs.

Bradford on Avon

We are fortunate in having Elders for whom strengthening our spiritual roots is a matter of prime importance. They arrange series of talks through the winter including a visit from Suzanne Ismail of QPSW to talk about Social Justice, reflections on Membership and encouragement for our Fellowship Groups to look at wider issues around Climate Change, and refer often to Quaker Faith & Practice. They also had the unfortunate task of grappling with a serious relationship problem between members of our Meeting and of another Meeting in the Area. Meetings for Worship for business are always preceded by a reading from Advices & Queries, and Meetings for Worship include a reading from A&Q on alternate Sundays. An informal Meeting for Worship is held during the week at the home of a member who is now too deaf to enjoy the main Sunday MfW, and there is a similar meeting on Fridays at the Meeting House which is valued by those who attend. The meeting is generous in funding attendance at the annual Quaker Peace and Social Witness conference at Swanwick (at which this year one of our members was the main speaker), especially for attenders who have recently joined the meeting, and also at Courses in Woodbrooke. A group of members attended the BYM Gathering at Canterbury, enough to justify taking self-catering accommodation. Our system of pastoral oversight is often a means of sustaining frail and elderly members or those suffering from a bereavement.

Three of our members are much-travelled activists, spending time abroad or in London on behalf of the Naga Conciliation Group, as Ecumenical Accompaniers for Peace in Palestine and Israel, and FWCC respectively. Other members support the Sabeel Prayer Wave, gathering in the Saxon Church (by permission of the parochial church council) for an interdenominational prayer meeting; while yet others keep a vigil for peace, collecting signatures for petitions to Parliament on behalf of a negotiated peace settlement or against the trade in arms, a spin-off from the peace vigil in Bath, and both activities provide good opportunities for local outreach.

We are represented on Climate Friendly Bradford, a voluntary group of activists who promote environmentally sound changes locally and nationally, and whose meetings we host in the Meeting House, on a tree-planting group and on local Sustrans.

One of our members is a Prison Chaplain at Erlestoke, a gaol for long-term prisoners. She has raised the Area Meeting's awareness of her work and of the injustices inherent in the prison system, and has been able to take various members of the meeting to accompany her in the meetings for worship she holds among the prisoners. The meeting also collects for Quaker Social Action, one of our more popular concerns.

We are fortunate in having a Meeting House with a car-park in a central part of the town, where otherwise the lack of parking space is a serious problem. The Meeting House is used regularly through the week throughout the year and the income supports our Warden's salary. Recently we have spent considerable thought and energy in upgrading the building, so that it is more carbon-efficient, changing the lighting in the meeting-room, putting up heat-reflecting blinds on some windows, and heat-reflecting panes behind radiators, draught-proofing windows, and running the radiators on low heat. We have also reminded hirers of the building to save heat and water by switching off and by turning off taps. Already our power bills show the effectiveness of these measures. The meeting house itself is a valued form of outreach, as the hirers like its carpeted floors and well-equipped kitchen.

As we live in a small, cohesive community, and are very much part of it, we take pleasure in supporting many initiatives in the town, ecological, conservationist, inter-denominational; Amnesty,

Fairtrade, and branches of various international aid agencies. At the same time, we are grateful for the support we receive from like-minded organisations in the town.

Chippenham

Chippenham meeting continues to welcome a 'broad church' of members and attenders, and enjoys receiving visitors from around the country. We often have valuable discussions after Meeting, sometimes about our own personal thoughts during the silence relating to Ministry; sometimes about our concerns about local, national and international affairs. We attend area and national meetings, as well as training at Woodbrooke, such as the 'Equipping for Ministry' course.

Members regularly write to MPs about matters connected with the arms trade, and write letters for Amnesty International about matters of justice and human rights. Social media (such as 38 Degrees) is used to try to influence government policy on matters such as the environment and the NHS. One Friend is a consultant in the area of public transportation systems, and is currently spending three months working in Bangladesh to address the developing transport needs in Dhaka. He is also involved with a charity called Health Bridge, which aims to promote walking and cycling for health, and this is likely to take him to Sri Lanka in 2012.

Members and attenders make small individual contributions to sustainability by buying Fairtrade tea and coffee, organic food and some grow their own produce. We also recycle wherever possible. Our meeting is using email more often as a means of communication, to reduce its use of paper and energy. One attender of the Chippenham meeting contributes to academic work on the development of Earth Systems Science, related to Lovelock's pioneering Gaia theory. His particular interest is in the boundary between theology and science, and he regularly contributes articles and delivers talks on this field.

A member of our meeting who works for Wiltshire MIND talked to us about the complete loss of funding from the government and how the cuts to mental health services make MIND's work all the more necessary. Our meeting gave a donation of £500 to Wiltshire MIND as a consequence. A number of our gathering are involved with the local community, either through their work or in a more voluntary capacity.

Members recently visited the 'Occupy' London protest camp, to offer support and gain a sense of the purpose of the movement. There is a feeling of allegiance with the movement's objections to the great injustices within the current economic climate. In April 2011 Sam Settle of the Prison Phoenix Trust visited our meeting, to which we had invited people of neighbouring meetings, and friends. He told us about the work of the Trust, which involves the teaching of meditation and yoga in prisons, through voluntary sessions with prisoners and staff. They visit about half of UK prisons, and send CDs and books to those they do not cover. Prisoners write letters to say how much they have benefitted from this programme. We were greatly encouraged by the ethos and thoughtfulness of the Trust's work, and so the Chippenham meeting subsequently donated £500 to the Trust.

We have built a reserve of funds over several years which has enabled us to support perceived need at local, national and international levels over the last two years. We are conscious of the need to continue to give, in order to continue this support.

Devizes Local Meeting Report 2011

For a small Meeting, Devizes Meeting is well represented in local community initiatives and in advocacy of issues that support the aims of our Testimonies and this is easy to document and discuss. However we have also striven to build and nourish the spiritual lives of individuals within the meeting and of the Meeting as a whole. At times it may seem that 'the doing' takes precedence over the spiritual development but in reality it is easier to pin point what 'is done' than what is being nourished and developed, since by its nature the latter is often confidential and takes place in a less structured way such as a lending of a book or a nudging of a person in a particular direction. Nevertheless we are mindful that the spiritual needs to underpin all that we do and are and we are seeking to explore it further in 2012 starting with a group of meetings looking at what it was that brought each of us to the Quaker way.

Many of our Members participated in establishing the division of our existing Area Meeting Areas into two new Area Meetings. In March our Elders led a Study Day based around the pamphlet 'Celebrating the Quaker Way' by Ben Pink Dandelion which helped us examine some of the fundamentals of the way we choose to live and worship. In July/August we were represented at Yearly Meeting and those of us unable to attend were mindful of its progress and upheld it.

For most of 2011 the Meeting House hosted the Devizes Peace and Justice group convened by two of our members and attended by several Members and Attenders of our Meeting. The group arranged talks and lobbied on several issues to do with peace and justice believing strongly that you could not have peace until the world is a fairer place. Sadly at the end of 2011 this group had to be laid down because of the conflicting time demands of its members and the establishment of other groups such as Amnesty International Local Group and the Devizes Sustainable network whose work overlapped. In October 2011 for Quaker Outreach Week, for which the theme was peace, we had a talk from Bridget Walker from Oxford Meeting on peace and sustainability, outlining the work that Quaker United Nations Office is undertaking in this area. We remain a Fair Trade church and have continued to make Fair Trade goods available through our permanent store at the Meeting House. One of our members manages this on behalf of the Meeting. In addition members of our Meeting sit on the Devizes Fair Trade Steering Group and have been instrumental in promoting Fair Trade goods in the wider local community as well as working to maintain Devizes as a Fair Trade town.

Members of our Meeting participate in the relatively new Sustainable Devizes Network, an initiative spearheaded and facilitated by one of our Members. This group aims to deliver talks on issues of sustainability that are open to all and to promote and lobby for sustainable practices within the town. As individuals and as a Meeting we have been mindful of looking at all our practices to ensure that we are consciously considering sustainability in the every day. Part of one of our Area Meetings was dedicated to exploring the issue in groups so that we could learn what other Local Meetings were doing or planning.

We have been an active partner in the Devizes Partnership of Churches with various members involving themselves in the different Partnership initiatives that support the town. Many of our members have been active in groups that work to strengthen the local community but that are not Quaker groups, such as the already mentioned Devizes Sustainable Network and the Open Door Homeless project. We have made available two packs to be distributed to homeless callers to the Meeting House. It is intended that these will be maintained through sponsorship by specific Members and Attenders. The packs have been researched by one of our members to ensure that they contain enough calories to ensure survival over a very cold night, as well as some goods to provide basic comfort such as toilet roll and antiseptic handwash. We keep abreast of provision in the area for the homeless so that we best signpost callers.

As a Local Meeting we have not undertaken anything specifically in the area of crime, community and justice, though community initiatives by various members of our Meeting contribute to tackling the causes of crime and to bringing about a more inclusive and just society. Individuals in our Meeting contribute through Prison Visiting and/or writing to people on Death Row or to those who have been identified by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience.

We are mindful of the privilege of having a beautiful and peaceful Meeting House and work to ensure that we balance the need to earn an income to sustain the building, with sharing it appropriately with other members of the local community especially those who would benefit from its peace such as AA. Our warden works hard to promote the Building as a venue for such groups and through this we have increased the lettings of our Meeting House in 2011. We have also renovated a garage and subsequently rented this out.

Frome Local Meeting Report 2011

The start of 2011 found our meeting thrown into confusion and pain by the circumstances leading to the resignation of our Clerk. With the support of Area Elders we rediscovered the spiritual resources and strengths that can be drawn from joining together in meeting for worship, including those for clearness and business. At the close of the year our meeting is gathered in a more adventurous place and looking outward again. Individuals have felt able to respond to the needs

for service both at home and abroad. We give thanks for this experience of the light and continue to hold in the light those who face pain and uncertainty.

A discussion group explored the winning essays of the Friends Quarterly Competition, on the subject of 'The Future of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain'. While the essays were appreciated for themselves, the impetus given allowed spiritual journeys to be examined as well as ideas for the future of our meeting: an invigorating exercise. Afternoon and evening light groups met in the winter and spring and were valued by those who attended.

Two of our families have moved away from Somerset. We shall miss them and wish them well in their new homes. We welcomed one person back into membership, and another transferred to Bradford on Avon meeting. Our small children's meeting meets most weeks and in November we greeted a new baby with great joy.

Our MP was written to on the use of drones for aggression and then challenged when he erroneously replied that Britain did not have such weapons: he apologised. One of our members has started a four month placement in Nepal helping and advising on early years' education in two charity's schools and a centre for children with different disabilities.

To celebrate Quaker week we invited a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Quaker and an Anglican to talk to an open meeting about their take on peace. Over fifty people from around Frome attended. We have since accepted an invitation from the Frome Area Christians Together (FACT) to lead the sessions on peace planned for their 'More than Gold' project in the year of the Olympic Games.

We have ongoing support for sustainability through the committed work of individuals in vigorous local sustainability groups. This includes the community garden at the Key Centre where we worship, which won an award.

We support and thank those many members and attenders who are active in their local communities as an expression of their Quaker beliefs. One of our Elders is also a Quaker visitor at Sidcot School.

At least five of our members continue a strong commitment to Criminal Justice at Shepton Mallet Prison, and with youngsters in trouble. One is a Prison Visitor and some attend the regular Shepton Mallet Prison Quaker meeting. Currently, the prison governor's rules says you cannot do both! Others are committee members of the Alternative to Violence Project (AVP), and AVP sessions continue to be run in the Prison. We work closely with the Prison Quaker Chaplain and a recent talk to Marston Bigot church has generated an interest in CJ work within that fellowship. In 2012 the Quakers in Criminal Justice Conference is at Ammerdown and three of our members plan to attend.

The difficulties at the beginning of the year did absorb considerable energy, but resulted in new ways of working, with tasks prioritised and shared among more members and attenders. Our experiment with clerking teams has worked well and will continue next year. The position of Correspondence Clerk is crucial to this arrangement.

We entered into a longer agreement with the Key Centre at a fair rent to secure our use of the Centre for worship. We are now using the large box designed to open out into a library and notice boards for use during meeting. It was paid for by the family of Betty Calderwood in her memory, so her influence is still with us.

The division of our old area meeting into two demanded a lot of careful work in the first part of the year. Our new more compact Area is already beginning to meet Frome LM's expressed concern for an AM which is a gathering for spiritual enrichment, for developing our community, and to conduct necessary business.

Trowbridge Local Meeting Report 2011

Trowbridge remains a strong and supportive Meeting and we continue to find our Meeting for Worship a time of rich spiritual nourishment. Our small numbers could - and sometimes do - create difficulties in filling posts, although so far we have succeeded in all the essentials; however it has

the advantage that we are able to get to know each other easily and we are able to respond readily to each other's needs. We are fortunate to have a small core of Friends and Attenders who play an active part in the Meeting and are very good at making things happen.

We were glad to host Area Meeting in November and this, too helped to cement bonds between members of our local meeting as well as the wider area community.

A group of Friends had planned a display in one of the windows in The Shires during Outreach week but, through no fault of Friends, this did not take place. However we hope to use the material at a later date.

A good proportion of our local Friends are active in approaching our local MPs on matters of concern in the wider world. Most of us are also happy to speak to others outside the Meeting about our faith and values as the occasion arises.

It is likely that at sometime during the next few months we will need to find another place for our Meetings for Worship. Amongst other considerations we will bear in mind the carbon footprint of whatever building we will be using. We are aware of the need to be ever more careful in our personal lives about the use of resources.