

Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers)

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting



Britain Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of
Friends in Britain

Annual report of the Trustees 2013

Annual Report of the Trustees

Public Benefit

Trustees work to ensure that income and property are used to further the Area Meeting's objectives as set out in our Governing Document adopted in June 2011 when West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting was created. During 2013, this work included:

- Managing the finances of the Area Meeting and its six constituent Local Meetings
- Managing the business and life of the AM in the absence of an appointed Clerk to Area Meeting
- Maintaining three Meeting Houses with the assistance of House/Premises Committees at Bath, Bradford-on-Avon and Devizes
- Employing a resident warden for Bradford-on-Avon Friends Meeting House
- Managing change at Devizes when the long-serving resident Warden wished to retire, helping Devizes Friends to appoint a Hirings Manager and engage paid and unpaid ancillary help
- Renewing the contract arrangement under which the Ethical Property Company Ltd manages Bath Friends Meeting House
- Reaching the final stage of adopting policies on safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, and on health and safety
- Supporting Friends' attendance at courses conferences and Quaker events.

Trustees in post January-December 2013

Judith Eversley	Bath (Trustee), Clerk
Sally Harris	Bath (Deputy)
Alan Pleydell	Bradford on Avon (Trustee)
Gordon Whittle	Chippenham (Trustee)
Jean Thomson	Devizes (Trustee)
Margaret Williams	Frome (Trustee)
Catherine Whybrow	Frome (Deputy)
Chris Pollock	Trowbridge (Trustee), Treasurer.

Governance & Finance

When our Area Meeting came into existence in early 2011, AM Friends were presented with the challenge of developing our own new ways of working and communicating. Trustees had the particular responsibility of reviewing our working practices and procedures. We continue to work on our Reference Documents, the detailed guidance on right stewardship of finance and property. During the past year we have drawn up new documents for Safeguarding and for Health and Safety which have been circulated for comment and final adoption. We have drawn up a risk assessment template for our own work and agreed a procedure for dealing with risk to which we are exposed, whether mentioned in the template or not.

We became aware during the year that a charity in our Area was running into governance and finance difficulties. Since it had “Quaker” in its name, we felt we should check with its Trustees what the issues were. Our thinking was that if there were problems, we might be able to help sort them out, but also that there could be a reputational risk to Quakers more generally, in which case we should report the problem to the Recording Clerk’s Office of Britain Yearly Meeting. We found that while the charity was indeed struggling to achieve its charitable purpose with limited resources, it was taking

sensible steps to resolve the difficulties, and our concerns were allayed.

We have revised and updated advice to Local Meetings on compliance with the law on copyright and data protection.

Right at the end of the period covered by our previous annual report, we were cautiously optimistic that the dip in our income following the creation of the new Area Meeting was a transient matter. While we are never complacent, we are confident that this was so and that our finances are in a good enough state to undertake the work that our Quaker witness requires.

We can confirm that there were no serious incidents or other matters in the course of the year which we should bring to the attention of the Charity Commission.

Property

We have still to submit a 'scheme' to the Charity Commissioners for the properties in our care, and are grateful to Friends House for its help with this; we hope it will be completed in 2014.

We own three Meeting Houses: Bath, Bradford on Avon & Devizes. The other three Local Meetings use rented property. We also maintain the Burial Ground at Widcombe, Bath. Apart from routine repairs and maintenance at the three Meeting Houses, some special expenditure was necessary, for example following water damage at Bath and Bradford after heavy rain. The quinquennial survey carried out at Bradford-on-Avon in 2013 had identified defects, and a start was made on remedying these, though the bulk of the work was still outstanding at the end of the year.

The Appeal for funds to develop Bath Friends Meeting House attracted generous donations and by the end of the year it was

clear that the first stage of work (on disabled access from the street to the main Meeting room) could be undertaken, and the contractor was engaged to start work early in 2014.

Our bankers

CAF Bank Ltd, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling
ME19 4JQ

Triodos Bank, Deanery Road, Bristol BS1 5AS

Our Insurers

Congregational & General Insurance plc, Currer House, Currer
Street, Bradford BD1 5BA

Our Accounts Examiners

Blomfields, The Courtyard, 33 Duke Street, Trowbridge BA14
8EA

The life of our Area Meeting

Mindful of the need to help our local meetings (and others) understand how Quakers in our area relate to each other, we have built a website for the Area Meeting, wwesquakers.org.uk, providing information on the six local meetings and a very short introduction to Quakerism. We have also created an indexed list of all members and attenders in our meetings. Such a list is inevitably out of date as soon as it is produced, but having it is a big improvement on the six separate lists that we used to have. We hope it will be another way to help Friends understand that they are part of a Society that is wider than their own Local meeting.

At the end of 2013 we had 174 members and 131 attenders, five fewer members than at the end of 2012, in turn a very slight decrease on 2011. New visitors come to our Meetings but they do not always become regular attenders; those who do are sometimes content to remain so without applying for Membership. This worries us, though we know it is a national trend. All our local meetings have difficulties in finding Friends to take certain jobs. We continue to try to find creative ways to do the work: co-clerking or clerking teams, appointment for short terms rather than the traditional three-years, breaking jobs down into more manageable tasks or limiting the activity to a short burst. Some jobs are necessarily more demanding than others and then we sometimes find that someone is willing to take on a less challenging job and that releases someone else. Managing Nominations is a Quaker art, and in practising it we acknowledge the help we have had from outside our Area Meeting: downloadable job descriptions on the Britain Yearly Meeting website and the *Right Ordering* reports and templates, originally from Luton and Leighton Area Meeting.

In 2013 we began our preparation for the once-in-a-Quaker-lifetime event that is the presence of Britain Yearly Meeting

Gathering (BYMG) in this area in August 2014. WWESAM Friends are involved in the planning stage. During 2013 we considered the exciting but challenging prospect of bringing the Quaker Tapestry to be displayed in Bath for two weeks including the week of BYMG. Twenty panels in all will be on display, some in Bath Abbey and some in Bath Friends Meeting House, 2nd -16th August 2014.

Inspired by the speaker at March Area Meeting, Sunniva Taylor, QPSW Sustainability & Peace Programme Manager we agreed to press for a decarbonisation target to be included in the Energy Bill; as an AM, we have a practical and continuing commitment to 'greening' our Meeting Houses .

We were represented at the 'Gathering for Action' on welfare cuts and inequality' at Woodbrooke in October 2013 and will act both locally and as an Area Meeting to counter and if possible reverse the ill-effects of public sector expenditure cuts.

During the course of the year we held three good, well-attended Area Meetings hosted by Local Meetings who provide the venue and Clerks and are responsible for drawing up the agenda and devising a programme that is a satisfying mix of business, learning and fellowship. Our observation is that it is a strain to fit all the Area Meeting business into just three meetings; while every AM is different, we note that other AMs have anything up to 10 such meetings a year, though four to six is more usual. We have asked all our Local Meetings to consider whether the current pattern of holding Area Meeting on the first Sundays in March, June and November is working and will be guided by Friends' views on this in the coming year.

Judith Eversley
Clerk of WWESAM Finance & Property Committee (Trustees)

BATH



Bath Friends began 2013 by getting a fresh perspective on our Meeting House – quite literally by lying on the floor under the cupolas! This marked the start of a year of fundraising for improvements to make the Meeting House an accessible, attractive and environmentally sustainable environment for all.

Highlights of 2013 included hosting three inspiring community events:

- Bath People's Assembly 'Visions for Change' in April filled the Meeting House with stalls and public talks from 20 local groups working for a better world;
- 'Party in the City' in May – free music performances for the opening night of the Bath International Music Festival; and
- an early Quaker week open day in September to coincide with Friends of Somerset Churches and Chapels 'Bath walk'.

The Meeting House is well used throughout the year by Bath and North East Somerset Council; AA groups; Bath Stop War Coalition; a local history group; the Woodcraft Folk; craft fairs and others.

Friends are troubled by growing inequality and hardship in our communities. Individual Friends have been active in successful campaigns against cuts to local bus services, public toilet provision and funding for Bath Citizens Advice Bureau. As a Meeting, we also support the local community through regular collections for Bath Foodbank and Julian House night-shelter.

Our community as a Quaker Meeting has been enriched by plentiful opportunities for shared worship, learning and

exploration of our spiritual journeys. Elders facilitated meetings for learning on Quaker testimonies, worship and service. We also reflected on discernment and working together as preparation for Yearly Meeting. With monthly shared-lunches and opportunities to share and reflect on poems or favourite passages from Quaker Faith & Practice and the Bible, there's nearly always something happening after Meeting for Worship on Sundays! Bath Friends Fellowship of Healing laid down their meetings towards the end of 2013, and we reflected with thanks on the years of quiet prayer and healing the group have given us.

Bath Friends continue in concern for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine and we were glad of the opportunity to provide practical assistance by supporting an application for a 2013 QPSW relief grant for the Child Relief and Development Association – a Palestinian charity working with marginalised children in the West Bank.

BRADFORD ON AVON



The life of our Meeting is the people who are in our community and we are grateful to have Klaus as our Warden. He has been in post now for over a year and brings to us a great sense of humour, efficiency – and real coffee! We were saddened by the death of our

Co-ordinating Clerk; we had an inspiring Memorial Meeting for her and enjoyed meeting her family, especially those from New Zealand. We took the opportunity to revise the job description and to welcome Eileen Brown as our Co-ordinator. Most of our committees function well and with two children coming regularly the C&YPC is more active. The Clerking Team of six manage the Business meetings in rotation. With Area Meeting happening on first Sundays in the month, we have felt agenda pressures and have moved our Business Meetings to the

second Sunday in the month in 2014. After MfW we ask if there is any further ministry and Friends have found this valuable.

We are lucky to have an active House Committee who have continued to oversee the 'Greening' of our Meeting House (MH). We were able to share Britain Yearly Meeting's commitment to becoming a low carbon, sustainable community with a group of representatives from several SW Local Authorities and Brittany when they visited our MH recently to see what we had achieved. Substantial repairs are still needed to the gable end wall but these will now wait until frosts have passed, hopefully in May 2014. The MH is well used by other groups including music therapy, Yoga, Pilates, Feldenkrais, a U3A psychology group, Climate Friendly Bradford and a poetry group. Our three Fellowship Groups have continued to meet at intervals throughout the year. We participated in BoA 'Churches Together' lent group discussions and intend to host a group in March 2014 at the MH.

Regular Quaker activities involve a taking part in a Sabeel World Wave of Prayer for Israel and Palestine in the Saxon Church on Thursdays, a Peace Vigil in Westbury Gardens on Saturday mornings where petitions for people to sign have included campaigning against the Arms Trade, Bring the troops home from Afghanistan and against cutting Welfare. A Healing Group meets regularly. We support our local Food Bank. Our Outreach activity this year involved an exhibition in the foyer of our library and an Open House Saturday in October. Meetings for Worship are held in the homes of Friends who need support, at Erlestoke Prison and in the MH on 2nd and 4th Wednesday evenings from 5.45 – 6.30pm. The Meetings Film Group has been active; and we won Bradford in Bloom again for our garden (this is the last year of this category)

On the wider Quaker front, as well as hearing Area Meeting speakers we invited Juliet Prager, deputy Recording Clerk, to talk to us on 'Building our Quaker Community' in March. Jocelyn Burnell and Ann Warren shared with us their

experience of Australia Yearly Meeting and visiting small Meetings in New Zealand. Nick Francis regularly updates us on aspects of Britain YM from his Trustee perspective. Overall a good if, on occasions, sad year.

CHIPPENHAM



Chippenham Meeting has had an enriching year. Despite not owning our own premises we feel welcome and very much at home at The Cause.

During the year we have had a steady stream of visitors and enquirers. Two long time Attenders Carolyn Long and Labake Teidi became members in 2013, although subsequently Labake moved with her family to Bristol. Our Friend Margaret Sadler who the year previously moved to Chippenham from Abingdon was appointed Elder and there was a change of Correspondent, with Carolyn taking on the role when Labake moved. At the time of writing our dear Friend Joyce Utting is moving to be near her family in St Albans. We will continue to uphold her.

Chippenham continues to share clerking and oversight responsibilities which works well most of the time; however we hope to appoint a clerk at some time in the future. We hosted Elders and Overseers Meeting in September, held a Summer Garden gathering at Margaret Sadler's, and enjoyed a Winter Warming evening at the home of Debbie and David Nightingale in the New Year.

Our Friend Rob Gallagher continues his work as a town planner in Bangladesh with wife Cora joining him for several months at a time. In November Cora gave us an interesting illustrated talk on her life in the city where she has visited services provided for people with mental illness. Other Friends are involved locally with MIND, Amnesty and other community

groups close to their hearts. Our bi-monthly Newsletter helps us keep in touch with events locally and nationally, as well as with and absent Friends. In addition it provides a forum for sharing inspirational writings by our own members and those from other sources.

As a relatively small meeting Chippenham friends often enjoy spontaneous and inspiring discussions after worship on Sundays. Worship itself may be silent, or with verbal contributions, leading to a depth of connectedness we value.

For the future we look forward to hosting Area Meeting in March. We also hope to send representatives to Yearly Meeting in Bath.

At a recent Meeting for Worship our circle of chairs expanded ... and expanded ... to include a total of 17 people present! There is a real sense that we in Chippenham are slowly growing in number and we are challenged to seek new ways to encourage connectedness, and openness to spirit and persons.

DEVIZES



2013 has seen a year of changes and tested our community to its limits! After her fifteen years of service we prepared to say goodbye to Liz Hutchins, our warden, who retired at the end of June. In the current economic climate we discerned a completely new way in

which we could be a viable community of Friends paying our way and dividing all that has to be done between willing volunteers and a local cleaning firm. It was decided to let the flat and the three garages and to employ a paid manager to handle bookings. It has been a challenge to keep a semblance of a spiritual community, caring for each other and fulfilling all

the requirements of a local meeting, and we are learning to live adventurously together.

In January we hosted a prayer breakfast for the Partnership of Churches, fellowship enjoyed by all and followed by a half hour meeting for worship. During the week for Christian Unity we were also joined by members of the Partnership for a Meeting for Worship.

Throughout January, we held a series of sessions looking at how we could become a more sustainable meeting. We had a review session in September to evaluate progress. In March and April there were two Bible study sessions exploring passages that inspired early Quakers and considering their relevance in today's world.

Four times through the year we held a series of social gatherings at the meeting house, with a bring and share buffet, followed by an opportunity to share our favourite places or a meaningful object. Other social activities have included visits to Friends' homes and a chance to view the DVD 'Dean Spanley'. A number of Friends were inspired by a visit to Kelmscott Manor.

Our garden and maintenance working parties take place regularly and are great fun. We work for about an hour after MfW and then break for a shared lunch, then back to whatever jobs are outstanding. The last one took place on December 8th.

Our Children's Meeting consists of four children. They meet once a month and there are four DBS-checked Friends who facilitate their meetings. In February, three of this team attended a workshop on All-age Worship, at Redland Meeting house. This encouraged us to hold such a meeting on April 21st. Inspired by the booklet 'Quaker meeting and me'.

We welcomed the new tenant of the flat who has strong local Quaker connections.

On July 7th the Partnership of Churches held its annual Songs of praise at the wharf. The theme was creation, and our

Quaker representative gave one of the readings. At the end of September the partnership held a Vision day, at the meeting house. It was an all day workshop exploring our way forward both individually and as a faith community.

As our Outreach event Howard Grace from Newbury Meeting introduced the film he had made in South Africa, Entitled 'Beyond Forgiving'. A number of Devizes people attended and entered into the discussion that followed. They explored the meeting house and partook of Fairtrade refreshments. There is a permanent display of goods from Traidcraft, on the dresser in the Marsden room and we are encouraged to think about our purchasing power.

As a temporary measure a group of Friends has been managing the bookings until the new hirings manager, Jacky Thomas will commence on January 1st 2014.

FROME

Our Pastoral Care Group of Overseers & Elders) met every 6/7



weeks to discern ways of supporting the spiritual life of Frome LM and how we care for one another. In October four of us enjoyed being part of the 'Woodbrooke on the Road' Elders & Overseers

workshop at Bradford on Avon Friends Meeting House. During the year we have continued the practice of Friends sharing their spiritual/life journeys after Meeting for Worship, with copies shared electronically or in hard copy with those not able to be present. (This same practice applied to the discussion sessions and learning sets that we held.) We have introduced the practice of reading from Advices & Queries at the end of Meeting for Worship each week to ensure that we hear all of

them during the year. This is in addition to readings that occur during ministry.

In September we changed the arrangements so that children now come into Meeting for Worship at the beginning rather than the end and we have an area of rug, cushions and books within the meeting circle. Our three regular young children have responded positively to this. In September we invited children and families from other Local Meetings in our Area Meeting to join us for meeting and shared lunch; one visiting family joined us. At our shared lunch in December our children & young people played musical instruments to accompany our singing of carols.

This year our discussion groups have all been held following Meeting for Worship, rather than in an evening. We have held four 'learning & sharing' groups on Meetings for Worship; Meetings for Church Affairs; Nominations and Structure of the Society. We also discussed queries posed in preparation for Yearly Meeting and on revision of Quaker Faith & Practice. The evening Light group continued to meet monthly.

Early in the year we were saddened by the death of an elderly Friend after a period of illness; she had facilitated an interfaith group in Frome for many years. A daughter was born to a member of our meeting and we look forward to meeting her in the future. We were delighted to welcome an attender into membership and to receive the transfer of membership of another Friend. Significant health problems have affected several Friends or their family members in 2013 and we continue to uphold them prayerfully.

During Quaker Outreach week we hosted a well-attended evening on the Ecumenical Accompanier Programme in Palestine & Israel, the speaker was Jane Harries, a previous volunteer. An article on Quakers and our Peace Testimony was printed in the local paper. At the end of the year we purchased a banner to display on the fence of the Key Centre where we meet, making a public statement of our presence and the holding of Meeting for Worship. Individual Friends

continue to write to our local MP to express Quaker views on economic, peace, health & education issues. A Friend who attended the QPSW conference brought the concern of increased military intervention in schools. We wrote to Frome College about our concern but still await a full response. We purchased the peace education pack designed for primary schools and Friends have shared this informally. In August a vigil was held in the town to commemorate Hiroshima Day. Individually Friends are involved in peace activities.

In March we invited Sunniva Taylor from Friends' House to speak to Area Meeting in Frome on sustainability issues. As individuals we strive to reduce our carbon footprints and many Friends belong to 'Sustainable Frome'. One of our group regularly takes part in anti-fracking activities.

A Friend spoke to us of the work of the Credit Union in Frome and as individuals we support the local food bank. Two Friends work with other volunteers in a community garden next to our place of worship. The project provides a hub for local people as well as a harvest of organic vegetables and fruit. Our Local Meeting offered a loan to the Bath Meeting House appeal to support the refurbishment. Within our own meeting we have a new DBS verifier and have appointed librarians to facilitate our use of books and information booklets. Self-employed Friends have been invited to place small business cards on our notice board. In discussions on the future of our Regional Gathering we felt that its continuation was not a priority with our limited resources. We have established a link with Christchurch meeting in New Zealand to offer friendship following their ongoing difficulties after the loss of their Meeting House in an earthquake.

In March the local prison at Shepton Mallet closed, ending our long association with a Meeting for Worship there. One Friend now attends the monthly Meeting at HMP Erlestoke, another visits a 'lifer' there and another has visited other prisons in the area. Several Friends are members of Quakers in Criminal Justice and one attended the annual conference. Two Friends

are still part of the local Alternative to Violence committee and one attended that conference.

We continue our practice of having a rotating clerking team for meetings for church affairs and our correspondence clerk provides continuity and facilitates the sharing of information. The safe storing of data has been much discussed and we have responded to guidance from Friends' House & local Friends. Several of us who live alone consider it important that the Meeting holds our personal details in case of emergency. This has been implemented for those who want it. Trustees have developed Safeguarding and Health & Safety policies that provide the framework for good practice in Frome LM. We are delighted that one of our members was appointed as a key holder and caretaker for the Key Centre, which facilitates our use of the building.

TROWBRIDGE



We have had our first full year in our new premises and feel very much at home in the Community Hub on the Seymour housing estate. The Hub is used by a variety of local groups including the Stroke Association, Guides, Credit Union, craft and self-help groups

and even the local Police Community Support Officer, who comes in to use the computer whilst out on the beat.

Our Meeting remains small in number; this limits the activities we can undertake corporately, but means that we have the opportunity to get to know one another well 'in that which is eternal'. This is reflected in the depth of silence and quality of ministry which we are able to share when we meet in worship. We enjoyed watching the DVD of the Trustees Report of Britain Yearly Meeting and were heartened by the work undertaken on our behalf by staff and volunteers in the Society.

Despite our size we still manage to fill the posts required, and members of Trowbridge Meeting give service to Area Meeting. One Friend is very much involved in the preparations for Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath in 2014. We are in dialogue with local schools regarding the militarisation of the school curriculum; Trowbridge Friends respond to Quaker and other concerns by writing to MPs, supporting pressure groups and financially contributing to causes.

We have two new attenders and an occasional visitor from the Unitarians down the road; we will be saying goodbye to Louise who is heading for the coast in the New Year. We extend a warm welcome to visitors to Trowbridge Meeting.

All the photos in this year's report are taken from our new website www.wesquakers.org.uk.

Registered address:

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting
Friends Meeting House
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BA15 1JU

Registered Charity Number 1134534