

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

West Wiltshire and East
Somerset Area Meeting



Annual report of the Trustees 2014



The Drones Quilt created for the Fellowship of Reconciliation was exhibited in our Area in 2014 as part of our peace witness

Annual Report of the Trustees in 2014

Public Benefit

The work of Trustees ensures that income and property are used to further the Area Meeting's objectives as set out in our charitable purpose and in the Governing Document adopted in June. In 2014 this work included:

- Managing the finances of the Area Meeting and its six 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 or Premises Committees at Bath, Bradford-on-Avon and Devizes
- Employing a resident warden for Bradford-on-Avon Friends Meeting House and a Hirings Manager for Devizes Friends Meeting House
- 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 2014

Judith Eversley	Bath (Trustee), Clerk
Sally Harris	Bath (Deputy) – until September 2014
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 and Conduct

Six members of the Area Meeting Finance & Property Committee make up the Trustee body. They are appointed by Area Meeting following nomination by the constituent Local Meetings. If the LM can also bring forward a name, a deputy is also appointed. The appointment of Trustees is subject to receipt of satisfactory references, one from inside the Society of Friends and one from outside which must refer particularly to financial integrity. A nominated Trustee must also sign a

formal Trustee Declaration based on the pro-forma from the Charity Commission, which establishes that the Friend is a fit and proper person to oversee financial, governance and employment matters in the Area Meeting. These probity checks are carried out by the Clerk of the Committee who also ensures that new Trustees have access to past Minutes and key documents.

Trustees work under the guidance of Quaker Stewardship Committee; they all receive a copy of the QSC Handbook for Trustees of Quaker Meetings. They attend training days, briefings and conferences organised at Friends House and Woodbrooke including the annual conference of Trustees. WWESAM Trustees are grateful for the advice and support given by staff, officers and committees of Britain Yearly Meeting, and for the fellowship experience at gatherings of Trustees.

WWESAM Trustees meet about six times a year, always in the evening so that Friends do not have to take time off work to attend. We meet in each other's houses, sharing a simple supper first, which helps us to know each other better.

We compiled a risk register in late 2013, looking at hazards under the headings **compliance, external, financial, governance, reputation** and two aspects of **operational risk: people and property**. We can confirm that there were no serious incidents or other matters in the year which we should bring to the attention of the Charity Commission.

During 2014 the year queries arose about the long-established ban on consumption of alcohol in Friends Meeting House; current letting conditions for all our premises make it clear that alcohol is not permitted in our Meeting Houses. A potential hirer of a Meeting House asked for the ban to be lifted, commenting that it makes Friends appear out of step with contemporary attitudes and could close off valuable letting options. Trustees' view was that it was for the AM to decide. Area Meeting in session in March 2014 minuted that "*Our meeting agrees to uphold the recommendation of our Elders and Overseers, and continue with our present policy of having no alcohol in our Meeting Houses, so maintaining a haven of no-alcohol areas, for those who appreciate that.*" We later found that a user had flouted the ban in another of our Meeting Houses when hosting a gathering after a funeral. Trustees gave some gentle guidance to prevent a recurrence.

The risk register is reviewed regularly.

Property

We own three Meeting Houses: Bath, Bradford on Avon & Devizes while Chippenham, Frome and Trowbridge rent rooms for their Meetings. We also maintain the Burial Ground at Widcombe, Bath. In line with the recommendations in the 2012 quinquennial survey for Bradford on Avon FMH, major works were undertaken to remedy long-standing defects on the gable end and in the basement. The first stage of refurbishment of Bath Friends Meeting House was completed during the year in time for Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering when large numbers of Friends visited our Area. We have still to submit a 'scheme' to the Charity Commissioners for the properties in our care, and are grateful to staff and advisors at Friends House for their help with this.

Finance

Our financial position and financial arrangements are set out in the Annual Accounts, available separately.

Our Bankers

CAF Bank Ltd, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling ME19 4JQ, Triodos Bank, Deanery Road, Bristol BS1 5AS, Coop Bank, 1 Balloon Street, Manchester M60 4EP, and Santander Bank, Bootle, Merseyside L30 4GB.

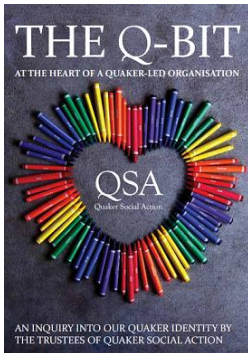
Our Insurers

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

Our Accounts Examiners

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

The life of our Area Meeting



At the annual national trustee conference at Woodbrooke in February, Joycelin Davies, a trustee of Quaker Social Action, talked about a QSA publication *The Q-Bit – At the Heart of a Quaker Organisation*: The title and the heart on the cover are explained in the book: where is the uniquely Quaker element of our lives and work, the *Q-bit*? We think it is the work we do in our local meetings: reinforcing Quaker values by witnessing internally and externally. This work goes on in our Area, as evidenced by the reports

on the individual Local Meetings that follow this introduction. We are encouraged by the reports of wide social engagement, of growing numbers in some Meetings, supportive fellowship in and between Meetings, and – especially in 2014 – the recognition that we belong to a wider family of Friends.

Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering (BYMG) came to our AM, occupying the Big Tent site on the campus of the University of Bath for a week in the summer. In September Trustees minuted that “*We look back on the presence of BYMG in our Area Meeting in August with appreciation for the hard work that went into organising it and are glad that we were able to play a part in welcoming and entertaining Friends particularly on the ‘Do something different day’ on Wednesday 6th August. Many WWESAM Friends attended all or some of the sessions and have spoken of the power and relevance of the business sessions, opportunities for fellowship and inspiration from lectures and special sessions.*” We note that Local Meetings then shared material from BYMG in small groups, e.g. by showing DVDs of the Swarthmore lecture and BYM Trustees’ report on Quaker work.

Panels from the Quaker Tapestry were displayed in Bath for two weeks including the week of BYMG - some in Bath Abbey and some in Bath Friends Meeting House – from 2nd -16th August 2014. There were 2,814 visitors in the Abbey and 2,413 visitors in the Meeting House (many viewing panels at both venues of course). It was, as Trustees hoped, an opportunity for many discussions of Quaker faith and practice. Reading through the Visitors’ Book (26 closely-written pages!) one saw again and again the words *inspiring, fascinating, beautiful*.



The Quaker Tapestry on display during Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath in August
Photo: QT

It cost us more than we had expected to host the exhibition; discussions continue on this but we are minded to view this as money well spent in terms of outreach.

Following consultation, Area Meeting determined that we cannot get through the business before us in just three meetings a year. In 2015 we will move to having four AMs - on first Sundays in March, June, October and December. We hope that will make for more relaxed meetings without encroaching on Friends' valuable spare time.

At the end of 2014 we had 175 members and 141 attenders; in 2013 we had 174 members and 131 attenders; in 2012 it was 179 members and 130 attenders.

The Area Meeting website, wwesquakers.org.uk was fully open in 2014 providing information on the six local meetings, notes on Quakerism and links to BYMG.

*Judith Eversley
Clerk of WWESAM Finance & Property Committee (Trustees) in 2014*

BATH

Looking back over 2014, it's the big event that comes to mind first: over two thousand Quakers came to Bath for Yearly Meeting Gathering in August, many of them visiting the Quaker Tapestry exhibition in Bath Friends Meeting House and Bath Abbey. Thanks to the generous response of Friends and charities to our Meeting House Appeal, we were able to welcome our visitors to a much-improved Meeting House with disabled access; a new spacious kitchen; and attractively refurbished meeting room.

Throughout the year our Meeting community has been strengthened by numerous opportunities for worship and fellowship:

- A day workshop on the Quaker meditation method 'Experiment with Light', leading to the formation of two small Light groups meeting regularly.
- A 'Kindlers' workshop on personal spiritual practices and practices for sharing worship together.
- A 'Becoming Friends' group who have met regularly to explore Quakerism and their spiritual journeys.
- After-Meeting sessions facilitated by elders on what it means to be a Quaker today and the long-term framework for Quakers in Britain.
- A summer picnic in the burial ground, regular shared lunches and groups sharing poems or favourite passages from Quaker Faith and Practice and the Bible.

Bath Meeting has also been enriched by Friends sharing their experience of national Quaker work and events such as Meeting for Sufferings, Quaker Life, QPSW's Spring Conference and 'This Light that Pushes Me' exhibition about African peace-builders, and conferences on addiction, mental health, and Quaker values in education.

We have been particularly concerned this year with becoming a 'family friendly' Meeting. Adults and children alike enjoyed a chocolate making workshop at the start of the year; a dozen or more Friends have

volunteered to run or help with children's meeting and we are delighted that we now have a children's meeting every Sunday.



The sailing ship *Awesome*, drawn by children of Bath Meeting learning about early Friends emigrating to the New World. In their list of 'essentials' to take on board are food, water, animals, smiles ... and cushions.

Photo: JE

Bath Meeting has been active in the local community, hosting events and talks including:

- A visit from local secondary school pupils to learn about Quakers as part of their Religious Education studies.
- 'Party in the City' – free music performances as part of Bath International Music Festival.
- Somerset Churches Trust walk around places of worship in Bath.
- Ali Morgan's public talk about her experience as an Ecumenical Accompanier in Palestine & Israel.
- A screening of the tax justice film 'The UK Gold'.

- An exhibition of the Fellowship of Reconciliation's 'Drones Quilt' with related public talks.

Our contribution to the local community was recognized by the award of the Mayor of Bath's Access Challenge Award to the Meeting House for the new disabled access lift. Concerned by growing inequality, we have continued our regular collections for Bath Foodbank and Julian House night-shelter, and ended the year with a well-attended silent vigil against economic inequality outside Bath Abbey.

BRADFORD ON AVON

Our year began, as it usually does, with our Social Evening, when we share a meal and entertain each other; often discovering hidden talent. Regular activities – the Peace Vigil on Saturday mornings, the Healing Group, opening our garden (100 people came in June) and joining with the Sabeel World Wave of Prayer for Israel/Palestine - have continued.

In March we hosted one of the ecumenical Lent courses on 'Temptation' and our own study group engaged with the 2013 Swarthmore Lecture 'This I Affirm'. At the instigation of Elders we are experimenting with using any fifth Sundays in the month with a shortened Meeting for Worship being followed on by Worship Sharing and a shared meal. During the first of these we reflected on 'Why am I here?'

Fellowship Groups have continued to meet regularly and to care for one another. We have invited speakers to engage with us including Ali Morgan from EAPPI. Several film evenings have been held thanks to Klaus Huber, our splendid Warden. Business Meetings are held monthly on the second Sunday after Worship. Our clerking team continues to work well.

Many of us participated in one form or another with Britain Yearly Meeting/YMG in Bath in August. This included stewarding the Quaker Tapestry in Bath Meeting House and Abbey. Our own Outreach continued when we had an exhibition in the foyer of our public library in November. As usual we participated in the St Laurence Secondary School Year 7 Church Trail.

Monthly Charity Collections have continued, mostly Quaker based, but this year we paid for a solar panel for one of our local Primary Schools

and contributed to Wessex MS Society in memory of our friend Ann Monblat.

The Meeting House serves us and our community well. Continuing the 'Greening Process' we have now exchanged most of our light bulbs for lower consuming LED bulbs. Work has taken place on endeavouring to avert flooding in the cellar and securing the gable end of the building.



Bradford on Avon repair in progress ...

Photos: KH



... and repair complete.

The Meeting House is frequently used by 'Climate Friendly Bradford' with which members of our Meeting are fully involved. Our lettings income has increased this year and we are still delighted to have our studio flat residents who help with the garden. We have hosted the national Young Friends General Meeting Planning group for a weekend meeting and note that a significant number of us serve Quakers at a national level. This may be the impetus towards a move in helping the Meeting towards a greater perception of being part of Britain Yearly Meeting and of the world family of Friends. We have made Quaker News, Quaker Voices and information on BYM structures as well as other publications more readily available (in fact unavoidable!)

Recently, in a bid to know one another better, we have started to hold 'Friendly Lunches' every three weeks on a Thursday.

As the year ends we are re-visiting our Local Meeting guidance on Membership and preparing ourselves for the discussion at Area Meeting which will be in our Meeting House in March.

CHIPPENHAM

Chippenham Meeting has had an enriching year. We have one new member and several regular new attenders. We continue to enjoy a good relationship with The Cause where we feel very much at home. An interesting and somewhat challenging experience was sharing these premises with an evangelical church for part of the year.

Attendance and interest in our Meeting is increasing with numbers at Worship more often into double figures. We continue to have a regular stream of visitors - both Quakers from other Meetings, friends of Friends, and new Enquirers. Visitors say they feel welcomed and often join in our informal discussions after worship.

To assist the smooth running of our Meeting, Chippenham continues to benefit from the service of our Correspondence Clerk. Two of our members attended the clerking day at Bath Meeting House and were able to put into practice some of their learning at our November Meeting for Business. We hope to be able to appoint a clerk at some future point.

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

Early in the New Year, Friends braved the cold and dark and enjoyed a shared supper at a Friend's home in the country. We held a shared lunch midyear, and a further supper in November. This social occasion provided an opportunity to share ideas about future activities - social and otherwise. Subsequent to this the idea of a breakfast prior to Worship was implemented in December when, in addition to delicious fare, we shared thoughts and experiences around 'Christmas'.

Food for the mind and spirit was also provided during the year. In February Anna Seifert an Ecumenical accompanier spoke to us about her work and life in Palestine. In March we were pleased to host Area Meeting, whilst in August, 8 of us attended Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering at Bath.

Other activities locally included placing a wreath of white poppies on Chippenham Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday, and beginning collections for our local food bank. Several Friends contributed pink

knitting to the Wool against Weapons Campaign. Other Friends are involved with local voluntary groups, whilst those who travel to far-flung places in the course of their work bring back interesting, humbling and inspirational stories.

Chippenham Meeting has a strong foundation in its worshipping community. With gradually increasing numbers we are challenged to find new ways of meeting the needs of both our worshipping and wider community. We continue to travel hopefully.

DEVIZES

This year has seen much activity, consolidating how we organise the practical day to day running of the meeting house, now we have no Warden. There are lists of friends who undertake to program the heating, manage the housekeeping, and keep in touch with the cleaners. Jacky Thomas manages the bookings and on Sundays we all have small tasks to make sure the premises are welcoming.

Through the year we have a number of garden working parties and general maintenance is undertaken at this time. We enjoy working together and sharing lunch.

We joined with the Partnership of Churches for a Pentecost Picnic. It was a glorious sunny day and we used our gazebo to shelter our display of information about Quakers and Quaker work, and were able to engage in useful outreach. Clare organised activities based on light and fire, and the children made splendid head-dresses. The event took place on Devizes Green, and there are plans to repeat the picnic next year.

The children's meeting is shrinking now they are getting older, and although we still have facilities if children come, we do not have programmed meetings. We are always here for them as and when they are able to attend. Three of the facilitators attended a workshop at Redland Meeting house, Quaker Life having planned to train for sessions of All Age Worship. We learnt some useful activities which we were able to use in two such sessions. One was in April in the Meeting House using the delightful booklet "Quaker Meeting and Me"; the other was in August in our ancient burial ground in Hillworth Park and we re-enacting the story of "Fierce Feathers" with the Quakers and Native Americans.

We hold shared buffets four times a year followed by discussions about a favourite place or poem.

We have enjoyed viewing two DVDs at a Friend's home, followed by a delicious tea.

In May we celebrated the twentieth year of our new meeting house, with a special cake made in the shape of the octagonal building. Two poems specially written for the occasion were read.

We have hosted two outreach talks in September and October. The first was given by Andrew Dey who has been working with War Resisters International. The second was a presentation by Paul Chapman, a local artist and historian, who spoke of Art in WW1.

Coinciding with this, local Friends mounted an exhibition of Quaker work in WW1 showing the work of the Friends Ambulance Unit. It is planned to update the display every year until 1918-19. It is on display in the entrance lobby so all visitors and hirers of the premises can study it.

Eight of us have been following the Hearts and Minds Prepared course and are finding it very helpful. Two long-term attenders are considering Membership as a result of studying the course.

We had permission to lay a white poppy wreath on the memorial on Armistice Day, and were joined by a number of members of the Partnership of Churches. We were able to publicise the meaning of the white poppies in the local newspaper, as many people were unaware of its history, even some members of the clergy did not know how they came into being.

We have been doing work on sustainability with members of the other Churches and working towards all becoming eco-churches.

We were saddened to say goodbye to our elderly Friend, Alan Green who, at the age of ninety seven, had become very frail. On December 22nd the family organised a humanist service at Semington Crematorium, led by Angela Ward, family members and Friends from Meeting.

We rounded off the year with a half-hour Meeting for Worship on Christmas morning.

FROME

Our meeting has grown in the past year, both in numbers attending meeting for worship and in its spiritual life. During the year we have welcomed three new regular attenders. Another attender went on an enquirer's course at Charney Manor. Two of our longer-standing attenders are committed to membership. Two Friends have transferred their membership to Frome. A new family has joined us, too, and brought three children to our children's meeting. Six Friends form a rota to help look after the children.

Our two elders and three overseers continued to meet every six weeks or so to support the spiritual and pastoral life of the meeting. Elders continue to read from Advices and Queries after meeting. Over the year all of the As & Qs have been read. On several Sundays after meeting we have held discussion groups, most recently to look at the four questions from Meeting for Sufferings, and sessions to enhance our understanding of Quaker methods and structures. Three more Friends have shared their spiritual journeys with us, too. One of our number has taken informal photographs of Friends and attenders willing to have their faces displayed to help us recognise each other. We had a delightful celebration after the meeting on December 21st with shared lunch and musical contributions from our young members. The well-attended Light group continued to meet monthly. All this has helped us get to know each other better "in the spirit" as well as "in the flesh"!

We hosted Area Meeting in November and heard a Friend from Salisbury Meeting talk about the well-established system of corporate eldership and oversight they have developed. This generated a great deal of interest.

Thanks to the proximity of Bath several members of our meeting took part in the very enjoyable residential Britain Yearly Meeting at the University, as residents or day visitors, as a steward of the Quaker Tapestry and organiser of a cycle ride along the canal. Shortly after BYMG several Friends met in Bath to enjoy the Tapestry exhibitions in the Abbey and the Meeting House.

On the Sunday afternoon of Quaker outreach week we invited anyone interested to attend a short "taster" meeting for worship, introduced by a Friend and followed by tea and homemade cake. This had received plenty of local publicity and was fairly well attended. It resulted in some

very good discussion. Our new banner cheerfully proclaims our presence each Sunday.

Individual Friends are involved in peace activities, such as the annual vigil to commemorate Hiroshima day and to protest against the bombing of Gaza. The main focus of 2014, though, was the centenary of the outbreak of WW1. Friends House produced some excellent literature and school teaching packs highlighting the importance of conscientious objection and the unpartisan role of Friends Ambulance work. These were shared with schools where appropriate. A number of Friends are members, some actively, of Sustainable Frome, part of the Transition Town movement. One of our group is very active in the movement to prevent “fracking”. Many Frome Friends are involved in local community groups, for example: Mendip Credit Union; a local food bank; governor of a local school; trustee of a local alms house; Friends of Palestine; a luncheon club for the elderly; a local museum; organising science lectures; a regeneration company; community gardening, and much more. One of our number has recently become a trustee of the community organisation based in the housing estate where we currently worship.

The monthly meeting for worship at Erlestoke Prison near Devizes is attended regularly by one Friend. Another visits and writes to a life prisoner at HMP Bristol. Two Friends are active in the Alternatives to Violence movement and several are members of Quakers in Criminal Justice, two of whom are planning to attend the QICJ conference in the early new year.

In the absence of our own meeting house as a resource we should mention how we use our *human* resources. Two Friends have newly joined our “rotating” clerking team which now numbers 10. This has worked very well for us, despite the potential for less continuity. Fortunately we have a correspondence clerk who advises and informs the clerks of Local Business Meeting, helping them build an agenda. This means that, with 10 clerks and 5 LBMs per annum everyone on the team clerks or co-clerks only once. This spreads the load and acts as good experience for those less accustomed to clerking.

TROWBRIDGE

Trowbridge Quakers have enjoyed a second year at the Community Hub on the Seymour housing estate; its simple, comfortable space is ideal for a small Meeting like ours, with little in the way of 'housekeeping' to worry us.



A warm welcome: Trowbridge Friends outside their meeting place

Photo: HH

This year has seen Friends involved in the Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath, a source of great inspiration, as well as attending Charney Manor for an Enquirer's Weekend in the autumn. We have begun to share our spiritual journeys in after Meeting sessions and these have been both enriching and enlightening, truly enabling us to get to know one another better. We have also enjoyed watching the 'Celebrating Friends' DVD over a shared lunch.

Two of our oldest members died this year, although poor health had prevented one from attending Meeting for Worship for many years. However, we have two new attenders who we are very happy to

welcome, and who bring fresh questions about Quakerism which are useful for all of us to consider.

We have been able to appoint Friends to undertake the tasks required for the next triennium, but have discussed and will return to the possibility of a different way of providing eldership and oversight. Friends who heard the Friend from Salisbury Meeting talk about corporate eldership and oversight felt this was a topic which would be worth exploring further.

Our numbers remain small but steady, with Friends committed to supporting the Meeting however best they can. As ever, Trowbridge Friends extend a warm welcome to all visitors.

All photos in this report were taken by members of our Local Meetings, except for the Quaker Tapestry picture which was taken by Bridget Guest of the Quaker Tapestry www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting

Registered address:

Friends Meeting House
1 Whiteheads Lane
Bradford-on-Avon
BA15 1JU

Registered Charity Number 1134534