

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting



Annual Report of the Trustees 2015



Early in 2015 Janet Sturgeon, Elder at Trowbridge Meeting, found this forgotten tête-à-tête daffodil lying on its side growing towards the light and it became the centrepiece of the Meeting for Worship that day

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Charitable Object

The object of West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the area of West Wiltshire and East Somerset and beyond.

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 2014. In 2015 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
- Maintaining policies on safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, and on health and safety
- Supporting Friends' attendance at courses, conferences and Quaker events.

Beyond those in existing membership of the Area Meeting and those in regular attendance, our meetings are open to the public for worship each Sunday as well as occasionally at other times during the week, such as the Wednesday morning Meeting for Worship held at Bath Meeting House.

Voluntary collections are regularly made during our meetings for worship for passing to Quaker and other charities which are directly in furtherance of our charitable purpose and of service and benefit to the public.

The Meeting Houses are also open for hire and use, in line with our general religious and charitable purposes, by community groups that use them for their own meetings and activities. These include visiting school groups, environmental groups, self-help groups, the University of the Third Age, yoga, meditation and Pilates groups.

Trustees in post January-December 2015

Judith Eversley	Bath (Trustee), Clerk - until March 2015
Jane Stephenson	Bath (deputy)
Alan Pleydell	Bradford on Avon (Trustee), Clerk from June 2015
Gordon Whittle	Chippenham (Trustee)
Jean Thomson	Devizes (Trustee)
Margaret Williams	Frome (Trustee)
Catherine Whybrow	Frome (Deputy)
Chris Pollock	Trowbridge (Trustee), Treasurer
Graham Page	Bath (Trustee) – from March 2015

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.

Property, employment and other management

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 2015, Trustees attended to:

Compliance with pensions law on auto-enrolment, continuity of qualified supervision of our staff, updating and approving staff disciplinary and grievance procedures;

Approving and overseeing incidental repair and renewal works necessary to the upkeep of our three properties;

Overseeing the right use of bequests;

Amending our accounting policies and payment approval procedures in response to comments by our auditors;

Redrafting and negotiating our contract with Ethical Property Company for the management of our Bath Meeting House, for formalisation in early 2016;

Revising our Safeguarding policy;

Beginning exploration of and undertaking a feasibility study concerning a possible agreement with a potential major new hirer of Bath Meeting House or other future hirers which would involve substantial alterations to accommodate their needs;

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.

Using the risk register adopted in 2013, 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.

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

In addition to conducting the ordinary business of meetings, keeping the local meetings in touch and fellowship with one another and coordinating their business affairs, in March the meeting heard from a member seeking to develop an idea for a travelling ministry. Work has been put into liberalising and making more understandable and accessible the ways in which attenders can consider and apply for membership. A number of Friends attended Britain Yearly Meeting at Friends House, London in May and heard our member Diana Francis give the annual Swarthmore Lecture on 'Faith, Power and Peace', which has spurred further reflection in our local meetings and further afield on one of our core commitments – the Peace Testimony. Also to this end, members of Bath, Chippenham and Devizes local meetings laid wreaths of white poppies within the traditional November remembrance services in their localities. The regular work of our Quaker prison chaplain at Erlestoke Prison continued. Two members were appointed as volunteer coordinators for a joint project with English Heritage to help document the significance of Quaker Meeting Houses, their history, context, use and settings. As part of our wider concern for peace in Europe and further afield two members attended a conference organised by Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Quaker Council on European Affairs: *Europe – Castle or Community? Quakers' role in building a new Europe* held in Brussels 4-6 December 2015. Meetings expressed growing concern about addressing the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in this country and further afield in Europe and sought to educate themselves further about existing activities and resources. Two Friends attended a conference on New Expressions of Quaker Community aimed at enlivening the spiritual life of meetings and the active engagements with the world arising from it. Follow-on activities from these concerns are continuing in 2016 and are set to assume clearer form.

Our meetings are showing signs of slow but steady growth.

At the end of 2015 we had 181 members and 120 attenders; in 2014 we had 175 members and 141 attenders; in 2013 we had

174 members and 131 attenders.

The Area Meeting website wwesquakers.org.uk provides information on the six local meetings including how to contact them and when they hold their Meetings for Worship as well as a brief introduction to Quakerism with links to other sources of information about our beliefs.

Alan Pleydell

*Clerk of WWESAM Finance & Property Committee (Trustees)
from March 2015*

Bath

We feel that our Meeting is in good spiritual health and that we have been enriched by many activities. Overseers have started monthly Simple Suppers so people can chat over soup and learn more about Quakers in an informal setting. We have had many Meetings for Learning including sessions on Equality, learning Clerking skills, end of life concerns and our Business method. We have had talks from the Carers' Centre and from Bristol Quakers on their work to get decent housing from unused buildings. Two Experiment with Light groups (guided meditation technique devised by the Quaker Theologian Rex Ambler) ran and the Friends Fellowship of Healing has restarted after a break. Our annual 'talent show' took place in January with music, singing, games and jokes over a shared meal. Families from the local mosque joined us for a shared meal.

Children's Meeting has brought us pleasure. It is now a vibrant and friendly group. Over the year we have had three all age Meetings for Worship on various themes such as George Fox and Pendle Hill, seeds and peace. The meeting on peace was around the time we laid the white poppy wreath at the War Memorial and some of our children joined us. This was the first year we have done this and we hope to carry on in future years.

We had a training session on working with small numbers of children with a wide age range.

We had a visit from several women who were involved in putting on a play about Annie Oakley (Little Sure Shot) at the Egg Theatre. Since Annie Oakley had been brought up as a Quaker they wanted to understand more about Quakerism. Bath Quakers were given a credit in the theatre programme for our discussions with them.

The Meeting House held an Open Day in September for visitors on the 'Ride & Stride' circuit to see round our building. We publicised the work of the National Churches Trust and the Somerset Churches Trust (contributors to our Appeal). During the day we served refreshments and donations received were given to the Refugee Council. During the run up to the Election it was used for hustings meetings. In May, as in previous years, the Meeting House was a venue for music groups during Party in the City (part of the Bath Festival); it proved so popular that people had to be turned away because we were over our number limit.

We have been approached by Bath Abbey and the Genesis Trust to see if we can help house Genesis when they have to leave the Abbey next year. At the moment we are exploring the idea by looking at how the building would have to be restructured. No definite decision has been taken. However, if we can get some planning issues sorted out we may be able to accommodate more people in the Upper Room.

Bradford on Avon

This year has been full of interest and challenge. In April we had a visit from Paul Parker, recording clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting. We were joined by members of other Meetings in our area. He left us with the questions, "What is your Ministry? What is our Ministry?" We followed this up in one of our Sunday Meetings when we have begun to use half of our Meeting for Worship for worship sharing along a theme or with chosen readings.

In May we were very proud that Diana Francis, one of our members, expertly delivered the Swarthmore lecture, Faith, Power and Peace, at Britain Yearly Meeting. Some of us were there and the rest have watched the DVD. We had a discussion session after Meeting for Worship, and Diana answered our many questions.

Two of our members represented us at the New Expressions Conference and came back with important questions for us to discuss. For example: *What is the core essential in our Meeting for Worship? How do we engage with each other? Our structures: what is important? and How do we engage with groups around us?* We are planning a day away at Ammerdown in January to think about and discuss these questions.

Our regular events continue. The Sabeel World Wave of prayer for Israel and Palestine on Thursdays, the peace vigil by a loyal few on Saturdays, the sale of Palestinian goods, Friendly Lunches, film nights and the healing group. Fellowship groups continue to give support to their members. Celia Feane continues to visit Erlestoke prison regularly. Four of our members hold positions in national Quaker work.

Following the Area Meeting in March about membership we have printed a revised A5 folded leaflet. We were pleased to welcome Ruthie Howard recently. Klaus has been hard at work de-cluttering the Meeting House and making the displays more attractive and more accessible. Thanks to Hazel we have a splendid library which she adds to with up-to-date publications.

House Committee continues to look at ways of 'greening' the Meeting House. The consumption of gas and electricity has gone down. The lighting is now LED and plans are afoot to replace the boiler and to look at the possibility of solar panels when funds permit. Climate-Friendly Bradford hold their meetings in our Meeting House.

We have recently signed the Wiltscan Declaration (Wiltshire and Swindon Climate Action Network). There will be a lunch launch in January.

Our own charity collections each month continue and also we help with the Christian Aid annual collections. As members of Bradford on Avon Churches Together we support the HUB in Bradford. This has a food bank and other advice sessions. In addition, we have started a collection of goods to send to Bristol Refugee Rights which supports those who have been given leave to stay in the country but have no funds to support them.

We offer a children's Meeting but visits of children are few but we are very happy this year to welcome Linden Pip, born in January, as a regular attender along with his parents.

Finally we congratulate our Friend Judith Hammond for a gruelling bike ride in Palestine in October to raise money for Medical Aid for Palestinians. She has been training for a long time and amazes us with her boundless energy.

Chippenham

Chippenham Meeting has grown in numbers over the year though we are still a small Meeting. We cannot all be present every week at Meeting for Worship but we have a strong feeling of friendship and support. We share clerking and other responsibilities and even if we may sometimes feel we are disorganised and slow things do seem to get done.

We have appointed Cathy Courtenay as representative for Chippenham Meeting to Chippenham Churches Together and she and Margaret Sadler attend these meetings together wherever possible. They find this challenging but are happy to attend to ensure there is a Quaker input.

Through Chippenham Churches Together we are also pursuing a connection with the Bybrook Refugee Crisis Support Network and hope to discover what is happening in our area and how we may be able to become involved. We recently wrote to the Muslim community in Trowbridge seeking contact but unfortunately there has been no reply as yet.

On the second Sunday of each month we now hold a discussion

or listen to a talk led or given by local and visiting Friends. One session was led by Lin Patterson from Bath Meeting and in a recent one we discussed the question of prejudice prompted by an article in *The Friend*. These are valuable sessions enabling us to explore ideas and questions in a supportive and thoughtful environment.

We also have several Friends who work regularly abroad and are able to bring back to us details of life in another culture and thoughts arising from this. Two Friends gave us an illustrated talk recently on Mizeram, India where they had worked and visited, followed by a lively question and answer session.

In other parts of our Meeting's life we contributed to the seven mile long pink knitted scarf as part of Wool Against Weapons; eight Friends were able to attend Yearly Meeting in Bath and two attended a Clerking Course held at Bath Meeting House.



Cora and Megan with pilgrims they met in Mizeram

As a Meeting we are preparing ourselves to be ready to offer a Children's Meeting should the need arise and we also contribute items to the Chippenham Food Bank.

As well as the spiritual life of the Meeting we find that food and drink seem to feature in our life together and during the year we have enjoyed shared lunches, a shared breakfast and a shared supper, all of them relaxed and enjoyable special occasions.

Last November we were able for the second time to lay a white poppy wreath at the Chippenham Cenotaph as part of Remembrance Sunday. We hope to be able to do this again this year.

Looking back this has been a loving and fulfilling year for Friends of Chippenham Meeting.

Devizes

This has been a mixed year for the meeting with sadness as well as achievements. Three of our long standing members died during the year, Alan Green in December 2014, Margaret Griffin in January 2015 and in October, Gil Brookes, one of our elders, died. They are greatly missed by all of us. Gil's energy and love for the meeting and the people in it will be hard to replace. Memorial meetings were held for each of them followed by refreshments and an opportunity to meet the families. In addition, several prominent members and attenders have had to undergo surgery or have faced illness or bereavement during the year. As a meeting we have needed to support each other and work together to ensure that the business of the meeting is completed.

On the positive side, the Meeting House has been completely redecorated, with new cupboard doors and floor in the kitchen. Our hirers were very patient with the inevitable delays. We are delighted with the results and now have a clean and attractive space for worship and to share with the community. Users of the building regularly compliment us on the wonderful atmosphere.

Many of them are looking for a place that supports sensitive work and find that the meeting house fills that need.

We have used some of the legacy from Kathleen Gandon to extend the library shelving to allow the amalgamation of the peace library and children's books into the main library. We continue to add selected books to the collection and our librarians are busy cataloguing.

We were pleased to welcome Kevin Albone, Jo Cross and Marilyn Longden into membership during the year. Marilyn's husband Paul is currently in Palestine as an ecumenical accompanier and we look forward to hearing about his experiences on his return.

The annual meeting in the Quaker burial ground in Hillworth Park was a decidedly wet one as we sheltered under a leaky gazebo but was fun nevertheless with contributions from the children. We laid a wreath of white poppies on the war memorial in November and were supported by members from Churches Together in Devizes. In connection with the commemoration of World War One we have a continuing display about Quaker work during the war and current work for peace.

Socially we have held bring and share suppers and a discussion group now meets monthly in different homes to talk about a wide range of topics. We have been able to support the start-up of a Devizes Interfaith group and held a very enjoyable tea party for families in the summer. Eating together is a good way to establish friendship and we aim to repeat the event.

Our quarterly working parties help keep the Meeting House and garden in good shape. Tasks include clearing the gutters, cleaning cupboards, repairing fixtures and tidying the garden. The hard work is helped along by a shared lunch, with tea and cake to finish.

Disappointingly, the income from hirings was less than last year. There were probably a number of reasons for this including financial problems for hirers, changes to hiring by Wiltshire Council and the closure for redecoration. We hope that our brand new website will help in gaining new bookings.

We have continued to think about how to make our building more sustainable and have taken some simple steps including shortening curtains over windows, putting automatic light switches in the toilets and labelling containers for waste, compost and recycling, inviting our hirers to help with this.

Frome

Frome Meeting has remained a constant available source of spiritual support for thirty-two members and twenty-five attenders during a turbulent year for the world. Two of our attenders became members and four people transferred their membership to Frome. One member died. We are fortunate in having several families with young children. The team who take the children has depleted, but we maintain weekly Children's meeting. One parent always comes out with the children but we are aware that we need to pursue DBS checks and seek more helpers.

The Pastoral Care Group considered and introduced a brief guide to Ministry to maintain good practice; initiated discussion groups on Eldership and Oversight; started 'Friendly suppers' for attenders who wish to learn more about Quakers, and organised some shared breakfasts. These were introduced for those who find it tricky to stay on after Meeting for Worship or attend discussion groups. Specific subjects around our spiritual journeys are discussed over breakfast.

Members took Meeting for Worship to home-bound Quakers when requested to do so.

The two Light groups continue to flourish. Meeting is closely knit within the local community as we worship in the rented 'Key Centre' attached to a primary school. One Overseer is the caretaker/manager and lives close by. Others are active in the Mount Community association and 'sustainable Frome.' Other members helped in diverse activities within their own communities local to Frome. These gave a wide Quaker presence in our area.

Several Friends are members of the Frome Friends of Palestine Group. Individuals have been encouraged to write to MPs both regarding the use of drones and the limited acceptance of refugees. Several Friends have offered homes for any Syrians in need. Our planned collections for May/June were changed to donate to the Nepalese village of Bungamati village co-operative, known to one of our members and seriously affected by the earthquake.

Our 'Outreach' event in 2015 embraced both the spiritual and physical aspects of 'the light.' There were three parts of the afternoon; readings around the Quaker use of the word 'light'; a talk about the sustainable power of the sun by an attender of Frome Meeting who is an Emeritus Professor of Physics, Imperial College, London; finally a time of quiet reflection in the manner of Meeting for Worship.

A member supports Erlestoke Prison attending monthly Meeting for Worship. Two members attended the Quakers for Criminal Justice conference at Ammerdown. Several members are involved with Alternatives to Violence who are seeking premises in Frome so courses can be more available to the local community.

Frome Meeting finds shared Clerking beneficial to the meeting as a whole and additionally for the involvement of more members. However, it would be much more difficult if it were not for the additional hard work of the correspondence Clerk who keeps us all up to date with national and local Quaker information. It can be a strain to have only two Elders but this is countered by a group of 'retired' Elders who act as 'upholding Elders' to maintain right ordering of Meeting for Worship if both Elders are away. This is an immense support and feels part of the cohesion of the Meeting. We anticipate Frome Meeting will continue to support its members, attenders and enquirers as we face local, national and international challenges in the years ahead.

Trowbridge

Late in 2014 our Friends the Hanlon/Hillis family, who have held this Meeting in their safe hands for so long, needed to be closer to home. After a discussion for clearness Trowbridge meeting surprised itself by finding a way to continue.

Our Friend Mark Taylor died in May. His faith in what he spoke of as the holy spirit, and years attending to the health of the meeting as it ebbed and flowed in size despite considerable health challenges of his own, has been strengthening for us. We were able to hold a Meeting for Worship at Mark and Aileen Taylor's house in April.

Our Friend Tom Hanlon's sudden death at 96 in September has also helped reconnect our meeting with the wider world, both in terms of the Quaker movement and the possibility of trying 'what love can do' to ameliorate the suffering in and between ourselves and in practical ways in the world outside our meeting.

Also in September a few of us attended Claverham meeting after picnicking beneath a beech tree in the garden.

We are grateful for our enquirers and our many regular attenders who are full of light and questions, and for Friends who hold the history of our meeting and the Society of Friends. We are a diverse and developing group. We are often 10 or 11 at Meeting for Worship now.

Six or seven of our small number have sung Taizé at Ammerdown Retreat Centre each month: enjoying a deep 10 minute silence at its heart. Attending Trowbridge Sings concert together in November made us realise the richness of local ethnic and cultural populations, and how we all migrate.

Some of us were able to meet for lunch (including Echo the dog) and listen to this year's Swarthmore Lecture. The recent move towards war challenges us all, and we value the openness with which we are beginning to express our different dilemmas.

This autumn, we began to seek out ways of relating our concern for refugees with the possibility of real families settling in West

Wilts. Five of us are making regular and real connections with people needing to learn English.

We thank Friends from Area Meeting for all their support: their advice and presence has been helpful, especially their upholding of the two funerals this year. We are proud to have provided Area Meeting with its Treasurer Chris Pollock (also Trustee) and very glad to have Area Meeting's blessing for our new overseer Karen Allen.

We ended the year with a shared lunch organised by Di Marshall at The Hub knowing that with inspiration and coordination from Karen Allen, Romany Buck's transportation, and Cynthia Legge's ingenuity the Quaker Christmas Shelter had more hats, belts, coats and trousers than it might otherwise have done!



Trowbridge Friends and Echo the dog

Location of our six local meetings



All photos in this report were taken by members of our Local Meetings

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting

Registered address:
Friends Meeting House
1 Whiteheads Lane
Bradford on Avon
BA15 1JU

Registered Charity Number 1134534