

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting



Annual report of the Trustees 2017



Quakers in Bath, Chippenham and Devizes laid wreaths of white poppies at local war memorials on Remembrance Sunday

On the Bath wreath (later stolen!) the inscription read:

In remembrance of all who die in wars

Laid by Bath Quaker Meeting

White poppies are courtesy of The Peace Pledge Union. They first appeared in 1933 when members of the Women's Co-operative Guild, mothers, sisters, widows and sweethearts of men killed in the First World War, were concerned about the drift to war. Over 300 wars later, and with over 200,000,000 people killed, the white poppy is a symbol of grief and the need to work for peace.

Annual report of the Trustees 2017

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 2011. In 2017 this work included:

- Managing the finances of the Area Meeting and its six Local Meetings
- Managing the business and life of the Area Meeting in the absence of an appointed Clerk to AM
- Maintaining Meeting Houses at Bath, Bradford on Avon and Devizes with the help of House/Premises Committees
- Employing a resident warden for Bradford on Avon Friends Meeting House and a Hirings Manager for Devizes Friends Meeting House. Renting out flats at both Meeting Houses, and garages at Devizes
- Contracting Ethical Property Company to manage tenancies and lettings for Bath Meeting House
- Maintaining policies on safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, and health and safety
- Continuance of our tenancy and work with the Genesis Trust, involving a drop-in centre for homeless people at our Meeting House in Bath. As well as maintaining our income, this directly furthers our social concern with service to the wider community
- Supporting Friends' attendance at courses, conferences and Quaker events.

The whole Area Meeting is contributing to becoming a low carbon sustainable community.

Beyond those in membership of the Area Meeting and those in regular attendance, our Meetings for Worship are open to the public for worship each Sunday as well as occasionally at other times during the week, such as the Friday morning worship held at Bradford on Avon Meeting House and Tuesday evenings and Wednesday mornings 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.

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. These include visiting school groups, environmental groups, self-help groups, the University of the Third Age, yoga, meditation and Pilates groups. The Devizes Meeting House is used by local Muslims to worship, until they can build their own mosque.

Trustees in 2017

Jane Stephenson	Bath (Trustee)
Alan Pleydell	Bradford on Avon (Trustee), Clerk
Gordon Whittle	Chippenham (Trustee)
Debbie Nightingale	Chippenham (Deputy Trustee)
Jean Thomson	Devizes (Trustee, until March 2017)
Robin Brookes	Devizes (Trustee, from March 2017)
Margaret Williams	Frome (Trustee)
Catherine Whybrow	Frome (Deputy Trustee)
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 (AM) following nomination by the constituent Local Meetings. If the Local Meeting (LM) can bring forward a second 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. This year they have also attended training provided by a local firm of solicitors (Stone King, in Bath) on subjects of interest to trustees and charities. 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. We meet in each other's houses, sharing a simple meal first, which helps us to know each other better.

Property, employment and other management

We own Meeting Houses in Bath, Bradford on Avon and Devizes while Chippenham, Frome and Trowbridge rent rooms for their Meetings. We also maintain the Burial Ground at Widcombe, Bath.

In 2017 our Area Meeting submitted detailed reports on our three Meeting Houses to the Quaker Meeting Houses Heritage Project. This was a joint project of Quakers in Britain and Historic England who commissioned professional conservation architects from the Architectural History Practice to survey Meeting Houses in active

use as well as some owned by Quaker Meetings, though no longer used as Meeting Houses. Each building was assessed in terms of heritage value, access for disabled users, sustainability, community use and management of change. Reports on 345 buildings were published in 2017 and can be seen on the dedicated website <http://heritage.quaker.org.uk/>. We are grateful to Robin Brookes, Judith Eversley and Ann Warren who collated the information on our Meeting Houses in Devizes, Bath and Bradford on Avon respectively.

In 2017, Trustees attended to:

- Completing the Lease arrangements for Bath Meeting House with the Genesis Trust (lease ending 13.12.18)
- Clarifying fire-escape access adjoining Bath Meeting House with neighbours Tilley's Restaurant (Readam Property) and negotiating a formal Easement. This work continues
- Negotiating Easement with neighbours Sally Lunn's for their extractor fans at Bath Meeting House. This work continues
- Upholding and meeting with Bath Meeting's Long-Term Vision Group
- The supervision of our staff
- Approving and overseeing incidental repair and renewal works necessary to the upkeep of our three properties, including the refurbishment of the kitchen at Bath
- Overseeing the right use of bequests
- Continuing with a detailed review and revision of all our policies and procedures (Reference Documents) to bring them up to date and consolidate them
- Becoming an employer accredited with the Living Wage Foundation, upholding their wage rates and encouraging sub-contractors to do likewise
- Liaison with the developers, and their agents, of the old Griffin & Fudge works adjoining the Meeting House at Bradford on Avon.

- Work on documentation relating to beneficial ownership of the three Meeting Houses is not complete. Trustees are reviewing this task.

Safeguarding

During 2017 Jean Thomson came to the end of her service as a Trustee and Safeguarding Co-ordinator. Trustees decided that the co-ordinator role should be shared by Maggie Williams (Trustee) and Judith Eversley of Bath Local Meeting.

A training session for convenors of Children's Meetings was held at Bath Meeting House in January resulting in new written guidance to adult helpers on what to do in the event of a disclosure by a child. During 2017 Trustees have reviewed and revised the reference documents relating to Safeguarding. Chris Pollock and Robin Brookes attended a training session on 'Employees, Workers, Volunteers and Safeguarding' run for charity trustees by Stone King in September.

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.

Trustees consider that the financial position of the Area Meeting at the end of 2017 is generally satisfactory. Donations are holding up well. Lettings income at two of our three Meeting Houses gives us additional financial stability. Uncertainty about the future of Bath Meeting House continues to require considerable attention from Trustees and local Friends and to incur costs for ongoing professional advice.

This year Trustees developed a reference document which describes the Area Meeting's policy on financial reserves (RD 2-8). The policy stipulates a reserve of 7-9 months' expenditure with an extra £35,000 for any emergency building repair. Our review of reserves in 2017 led to transfers between funds within the AM and donations of about £11,000 to external Quaker causes. At the end of 2017 our unrestricted liquid reserves were £110,555 (i.e. unrestricted reserves less fixed assets) and Trustees continue to monitor this.

Bath Meeting re-launched their Meeting House Appeal at Area Meeting in October 2017 to raise £80,000 for works including energy-saving improvements and necessary conservation work to the facade. Subsequently a grant of £10,000 has been agreed by BYM Meeting Houses Fund.

Trustees have examined ethical questions about the banks we use, in particular their investment policies, and agreed actions to positively support banks with stronger ethical codes such as Triodos. Internet banking with CAF has been set up.

Our Bankers

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

Triodos Bank, Deanery Road, Bristol BS1 5AS

Co-op Bank, 1 Balloon Street, Manchester M60 4EP

Santander Bank, Bootle, Merseyside L30 4GB.

Our Insurers

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

The Life of our Area Meeting

In addition to our regular Area Meetings held throughout the year bringing all six Local Meetings together to conduct our joint business we send representatives to national and international conferences and workshops on Quaker social and peace concerns and invite speakers to our Meeting Houses. Trustees actively encourage all members and attenders to go to conferences and courses to increase their (and our) understanding of Quaker work and belief and improve and develop our practices. We normally pay all expenses.

In 2017 these included:

- Justice and Peace in Islam, a talk at Bath Friends Meeting House by Rashad Azami, in October
- A joint meeting with the Bath Interfaith Group at Bath Friends Meeting House concerning refugees and asylum seekers
- Friends doing valuable and effective work at a local level through Churches Together, civic groups or local authorities
- Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) conference at Woodbrooke attended by Ruth and Mike Marshall, Ali Morgan and Alan Pleydell
- The QPSW conference attended by Annie Stables, Jonny Apples and their son
- Cora Gallagher attended the Quaker Prison Chaplain conferences at Woodbrooke, supporting her in her role of Chaplain at Erlestoke Prison
- Ann Warren attended the training for Area Meeting Custodians of Quaker Records at Friends House
- Susan Tomes attended the Quaker School Governor event in March at Warwick University
- Abbey Thornton, a Quaker student at Bath, attended the Quaker Life Conference in April
- Davie MacDonald, Bath's new overseer, attended a course on "Exploring Oversight" in November
- Jacky Thomas of Devizes LM attended a course on Muslim Women: Myths and Truths at Woodbrooke in October 2017.

Our Area Meetings normally conclude with a talk. In 2017 these were:

- March 2017: Gill Sewell, Outreach Development Officer, Quaker Life, on Outreach and how, living as Quakers, we are showing our witness to the world
- June 2017: John Saunders, Chairman of 'Open Door Project, Devizes' on their provision for the homeless in Devizes, including meals, facilities for laundry, and showering, and getting new clothes.
- October 2017: Nikki Jones on 'A general overview of the UK's energy mix and why the government is so keen on fracking'. The York Street Artists - a Quaker art group - also displayed an art exhibition.
- December 2017: Our Meeting ended with a time of all-age fellowship, listening to and participating in music-making.

Our membership and attendance have increased this year as indicated in the following table. For the first time we are showing a total column:

Year	Members	Attenders	Total
2013	174	131	305
2014	175	141	316
2015	181	120	301
2016	187	130	317
2017	190	131	321

The Area Meeting website wwesquakers.org.uk provides information on the six Local Meetings, notes on Quakerism and links to Britain Yearly Meeting.

Jane Stephenson, Clerk to WWESAM Finance & Property Committee (Trustees)
Alan Pleydell, Clerk in 2017

Bath

There is continuity with last year's report, in two preoccupations. First, since December 2016, the Genesis Lifeline drop-in centre has been using our Lower Room, giving advice, support and refreshment to homeless and precariously housed people. The room has been redecorated and its kitchen has been refitted so that a hot breakfast can be served on Saturday mornings in the winter. We collect clothing, toiletries and basic home equipment for users of the drop-in centre.



Judy Ling Wong encouraging openness

The other thread is a concern about whether we can embrace diversity. We hosted a talk by Judy Ling Wong, President of the Black Environment Network, on inclusion and diversity inspiring us to seek work with other groups, and to search out those groups. Both outreach and 'inreach' are served by our new website

managed by William and Sophia Heath. It attracted 17,000 'views' in 2017 from nearly 3,000 visitors, and the number of views is growing. Our Twitter account, @BathQuakers, has well over 200 followers.

In October we re-launched our appeal to refurbish the windows with secondary glazing, draughtproof the doors and install low-energy lighting to reduce energy use. We continue to hope for an eventual connection into the hot wastewater from the Roman Baths which would further reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

We laid a white poppy wreath at the Armistice Day ceremony, although sadly it was stolen. We host regular meetings of Bath Stop War including the public meetings in its 'Rethinking Security' series. Our vaults provide storage for the placards and petitions for the weekly peace vigil outside Bath Abbey. There was a different offering of peace when we opened the Meeting House during the Christmas Market to shoppers for quiet and rest.

We held simple suppers through the year bringing Bath Friends together socially and we had our second Quiet day at the Old Barn, Kelston Roundhill.

We now house the Bath Interfaith Library on our bookshelves and once again opened the Meeting House for free music during Bath Festival's Party in the City in May. Journeymen Theatre brought their play, *The Bundle*, a story of an asylum seeker to our Meeting House in July. We registered as a Visible Space with OneBodyOneFaith, the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement.

The building has also hosted electoral hustings and political meetings. It is the venue of choice for the Historical Society and many socially conscious groups, such as the Bath & District United Nations Association.

We are facing the truth about becoming financially sustainable when the Heritage Services department of Bath & NE Somerset Council ceases to hire our space in 2019. We set up a two-pronged Long-Term Vision Group which worked hard examining the options.

Our worship underpins all of this, nourishing our spirits as we live out the call to service, community, sustainability, peace, truth, equality and simplicity.

Bradford on Avon

2017 has seen a year of steady development of worship, spirituality and fellowship in our Meeting, which has, encouragingly, seen a growth in average attendance at Meeting on Sundays from around 25 a couple of years ago to a steady 35-40 currently. This has been greatly helped by having a regular three, and sometimes four, young families, so we now have a thriving young children's class. In practical membership terms we welcomed six new members into the Meeting.

In our Meeting pastoral care is exercised by Fellowship Groups, and with the rise in attendance we have extended these from three to four groups. These groups meet regularly, at least bi-monthly, for shared picnic or meal, a go-round to review how friends are feeling and coping with life, and sometimes for discussion of a particular topic of local or national Quaker interest. We also have our annual New Year's Social event, now extended earlier to accommodate the children, and we have initiated the holding of an outdoor Meeting for Worship near the Priory Barn in July – happily the weather was clement. We had a notice facing outwards to let passers-by know what we were up to, and this attracted some interest as well as audible shushing of noisier elements! We now have a regular fortnightly reading during

Meeting for Worship from Quaker Faith & Practice, and Advices and Queries are read at our Business Meetings.

The Meeting House itself continues to be a good source of letting income and interest has been attracted from our winning of the Bronze Eco-Church award. We are now trying for the Silver. We have not made many additional changes to the sustainability of the Meeting House, as it is now pretty much up to the mark, but we have observed that with the changes we have made, and even though there has been increased use of the Meeting House as a venue, the overall electrical energy consumption has reduced by 12% in the year. The wooden platform and railings outside the small meeting room have been replaced, and the garden is enjoyed by all, and not just Friends.

In terms of outreach, Friends will remember that Gill Sewell from Quaker Life came to speak to Area Meeting at Bradford on Avon last March, and encouraged us to rise to the challenge of the use of social media to promote ourselves more, particularly to younger people. We are pursuing this, and the planned meeting in February 2018 which had to be cancelled owing to the illness of the speaker will be re-arranged for later in 2018. We also welcomed Lucy Roberts of the American Friends Service Committee to speak at a well-attended public meeting during Outreach Week on their work in SE Asia. We also had a performance of The Bundle put on by Journeymen Theatre in July.

Friends are involved as individuals in many groups around the town, and in particular at present are part of a group from all the churches in Bradford on Avon exploring ways of helping refugees coming into our area, such as helping teach English and providing transport.

One of our members carries mobile phones and clothing to a

refugee centre in Bristol.

Through Bradford on Avon Churches Together we support the work of The Hub with their Food Bank, benefits advice, and debt counselling.

Chippenham

We are a small Meeting and seem to be getting older and smaller! However, everyone contributes whatever they can, and we seem to get things done. We meet at The Cause Music and Arts Centre and take it in turns to open up and set up Meeting. It is usually extremely quiet but just occasionally we hear the faint strains of music from other groups meeting in nearby rooms, not intrusive at all but strangely welcoming.

This has been a quiet year for us in which we have continued to meet for shared lunches in Friends' homes and for evening Bible studies. Our newsletter keeps us in touch with Friends who have moved away and together with home visits keeps older Friends up to date and part of our Meeting.

In the Spring we held a Memorial Meeting for our long-standing Friend, Joyce Utting, and this was a joyful occasion when family, Friends and friends were able to remember her with great affection.

We also continue as part of North Wilts Churches Together and are now committed to regular financial support for Chippenham Street Pastors. As part of our charitable giving this year we have also supported Quaker Social Action, Changing Tunes, Olive Tree and the Bhopal Medical Appeal among others.

Our Friend Cora Gallagher is Prison chaplain on behalf of Area Meeting, a role she continues to grow into and in which she finds great satisfaction.

We were able to lay a white poppy wreath at The Cenotaph again this year, an opportunity we value. We continue to support the Chippenham Food Bank and Doorway. Individually Chippenham Friends live out their Quaker faith in the wider community, involved in, among other things, Amnesty International, Prisoner Penfriends and Facing Africa. Two Friends are part of the countrywide Quaker Lesbian Group and York Street Artists.

As a small local Meeting we value the support and friendship of our Area Meeting Friends and look forward to strengthening ties and to developing our Ministry.

Devizes

Devizes Meeting is thriving in spirit. It has done us good to share more in the running of our Meeting, including taking turns at clerking our Local Meeting for business. This has worked quite well, and we are glad to appoint Kevin Albone as our clerk for the coming year. Two or three times a year we hold a working party after Meeting to catch up on maintenance around the premises. We have a shared lunch and sometimes afternoon tea if we have done particularly well.

Discussion groups have been held once a month during the autumn and winter months. Friends have taken turns inviting others to their home. Three times a year we have a shared buffet at the Meeting House on Friday evenings during which we each share some object, poem or other writing which holds meaning for us. On the first Sunday of each month we meet for breakfast an hour before Meeting for Worship. These are lightly attended but convivial.



Devizes Friends meet for Breakfast before Meeting for Worship

In April, Jane Stephenson, our Area Meeting representative on Meetings for Sufferings, came to talk to us about this central committee and her work.

We improved upon our Eco-Church award by supporting local events that aim to reduce the environmental footprint of the town and attended several events during February 2017. Several Friends are members of the local Transition Town group - Sustainable Devizes. We host the group's series of talks, held on Wednesdays throughout Autumn and Winter. Four issues of the newsletter each offered 10 energy Saving Tips for the home and 10 for using cars economically.

Our wider commitment to Fair Trade includes keeping a Traidcraft stall at the Meeting House and holding occasional coffee mornings to encourage more sales. We have Toilet Twins, which means that we have sponsored two latrines, one in Africa and one in Nepal. Photos are in the ladies and gents loos.

Members of the Meeting are involved with Churches Together in Devizes and the local multi-faith group and the Meeting House is

used by multi-faith groups and for Muslim Friday prayers.

For the third year running we laid a wreath of white poppies on the town war memorial on Remembrance Sunday.

During Outreach Week in October there was a talk at Devizes FMH by Bill Yates titled: The Quakers – A Peculiar people? He gave a thoroughly interesting account of the conflict, at the end of the nineteenth century, between the two strands of Quakerism, the evangelicals who were introducing ideas such as a creed, ministry and scriptural authority and Quakers who stuck to the original Quaker insights about faith and were less perturbed by Darwin's theory of evolution. This culminated in the Manchester Conference in 1895 and the eventual triumph of the theologically liberal, socially active strand of Quakerism we have in Britain today.

Frome

During 2017, our meeting place at the Key Centre came under new management from the County Council. Concerns were raised when we were asked to keep a list of names of all those attending Meeting for Worship in case of fire. As the building serves as a place of worship on a Sunday some Friends found this inappropriate as it is not required in other churches. A middle way has now been found to uphold our principles and the fire regulations. We have a Friend who liaises with the Key Centre about issues such as these and three Friends who organise the opening and locking of the building.

Our Meeting continues in good heart although two Friends have died this year as well as our 100-year-old 'attender' whom we visited regularly at his home for Meeting for Worship. He appreciated the contact with Quakers that he sought out in the last two years of his life. One Friend who left Frome many years

ago finally transferred their membership to a new area. We have had several visitors over the year, some who are now labelled as Attenders as they keep coming back! Some of us 'brought a friend to Meeting' during outreach week and we have been pleased to welcome them back on other occasions.



Quakerly Conversations after Meeting for Worship

Our Elders and Overseers continue to meet regularly as the Pastoral Care Group and we also take advantage of ex-Elders to uphold the Meeting for worship when no others are present. One current Elder has recently attended a relevant course at Woodbrooke. We continue to use a team of clerks to run the Meetings for church affairs and a correspondence clerk to support them and the Meeting as a whole. After Meeting for Worship we introduced the practice of sharing joys and sorrows which has been well received, with Friends' feeling that it helps us to get to know each other better – 'seeking to know one another in the things that are eternal'. One Light Group meets regularly in the evening at a Friend's house and another in the morning and both

are greatly valued. Lunch is shared after Meeting once a month and some Friends meet for breakfast and discussion on an agreed subject every two months or so on a Sunday morning before Meeting for Worship. A Friend ran a Meeting for Learning on two occasions on the Leadings of the Spirit in our Meetings for Church Affairs. We have a children's Meeting and our three little boys who attend regularly love to share their activities with us afterwards and we love to be part of that. Other children also attend occasionally.

Trowbridge

We have had a mixed year welcoming new people, always warmed by people we know returning as they can, and saying goodbye to one attender who, for two years, has been central and whose life is now taking him in another direction. We hope he will keep in touch.

Trowbridge Meeting has seven members who attend regularly, and three attenders who are central to our life and presence in Trowbridge. We have many visitors whose presence is heart warming. We are sometimes two in number and sometimes ten.

We are thankful that some members and attenders are able to contribute to the Life and working of Area Meeting by fulfilling roles and attending Area Meeting itself. Two people in our Meeting, whose direct work with refugees has moved us, were enabled to represent Area and Trowbridge Meetings at the Forced Migration Conference in February. We are thankful for the invitations from other Meetings to occasional events and are pleased to attend when we can (without depleting Trowbridge so much that there is no one to open up!).

from the pamphlet 'Being Quaker, Doing Quaker' and made a start on the Quaker Testimonies which we plan to continue in 2018.

We enjoyed a couple of shared lunches this year, and our usual 'half and half' Christmas Meeting with half an hour of silence followed by sharing readings which have moved us both to tears and laughter.

Friends, we are glad to be here.

Photo credits

Photos of Friends in this report were taken by members of our
Local Meetings.

Location of our six local Meetings



West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting

Registered address:

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Registered Charity Number 1134534

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