

Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers)

West Wiltshire and East Somerset
Area Meeting

Annual Report of the Trustees 2019



Front: A welcome to all from Chippenham Friends

All photographs were taken by the Local Meetings

Annual Report of the Trustees 2019

Trustees in 2019

- Bath: Jane Stephenson (Trustee), Kate Macdonald (Deputy Trustee)
- Bradford on Avon: Angela Le Grice (Trustee)
- Chippenham: Debbie Nightingale (Trustee)
- Devizes: Robin Brookes (Trustee)
- Frome: Elaine Hunter (Trustee)
- Trowbridge: Chris Pollock (Trustee and AM Treasurer until December 2019)

At the time of submitting this Annual Report these changes had taken place:

- Trowbridge: Alison Hillis (Trustee from January 2020)
- AM Treasurer from January 2020: Elaine Hunter

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, primarily in its administrative area of West Wiltshire and East Somerset, and also beyond.

Our Meetings for Worship are open to the public and to Friends and Attenders, for worship each Sunday as well as occasionally at other times during the week, such as

the Wednesday evening meeting held at Bradford on Avon Meeting House and on Tuesday evenings and Wednesday mornings at Bath Meeting at the Central United Reform Church. We also support the emerging Chocolate Factory Worshipping Group in Keynsham. Voluntary collections are regularly made during our Meetings for Worship for passing to Quaker and other charities in furtherance of our charitable purpose.

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. We are aware of the Charity Commission's guidance on our responsibilities concerning public benefit. Our activities as Quakers are, we hope and believe, beneficial to the public. While we focus our activities on the 'protected characteristic' of those who join with us in Quaker worship, our Meetings for Worship are open to everyone. We strive to do no harm, and our work does not benefit individuals financially or for their personal gain.

In 2019 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 Area Meeting.
- Maintaining policies on safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk from harm, and health and safety.

- Working with Bristol Area Meeting, North Somerset Area Meeting and Quaker Life on the centrally-financed Youth Development Worker project, to encourage and facilitate participation by 11-18-year-old Friends in the lives of Meetings across the West



of England. This included supporting regular 'Young Friends' Friday' gatherings, and enabling Young Friends from Bristol

and Bath to attend the London Youth Climate summit at Friends' House on 22 April, where they met the climate emergency activist Greta Thunberg.

- Providing a Quaker Prison Chaplain for HMP Erlestoke.
- Maintaining Meeting Houses at Bath, Bradford on Avon and Devizes with the help of local Friends serving on House / Premises Committees.
- Managing the maintenance of Bath Burial Ground.
- Working with the Ethical Property Company to take care of the empty Bath Meeting House while waiting to put it on the market.
- Employing a Resident Warden for Bradford on Avon Meeting House and a Hirings Manager for Devizes Meeting House.

- Renting out flats at both Bradford on Avon and Devizes Meeting Houses, and garages at Devizes.
- Developing new connections and friendships with Bath Central United Reform Church where we now rent rooms for Bath Meeting.
- Providing an engraved plaque to mark the site of the old Quaker Burial Ground in Westbury in Wiltshire, after its conservation as a community space.
- Supporting Friends' attendance at courses, conferences and Quaker events

The Meeting Houses are also open for hire and use, in line with our religious and charitable purposes, by community groups that use them for their own meetings. These include 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 for worship, until they can build a mosque.

Sustainability

Oversight: strengthening our community's work for better sustainability

Devizes Friends took the lead in arranging a visit to the Centre for Alternative Technology at Machynlleth in which several AM Friends joined.

Eldership: our commitment to sustainability in our faith

Bath Friends helped to organise a Climate Hustings ahead of the local elections to focus attention on candidates' commitment to sustainability at city level. They also retain their commitment to meeting close to good local

public transport links. Bradford on Avon Meeting House was used regularly by Climate Friendly Bradford for meetings and events. Bradford on Avon Friends supported Give and Take reuse and swapping events for local young families. Frome Friends applied for council funding to develop a QPSW sustainability project. Devizes Friends continued to host and support talks by Sustainable Devizes for public education.

Right ordering: Quaker core activity and property as these relate to sustainability

Bradford on Avon Meeting House has had secondary glazing installed, working towards the A Rocha gold standard Eco Churches award, and its garden is a growing asset for the community as well as Friends. Its car parking has been reduced and extra cycle parking provision added. Devizes Meeting achieved the A Rocha silver Eco Church award, and have a new bug house in the garden. Its solar panels are working well. Bath Friends have set up a Gardening Group for the former Bath Quaker Burial Ground, for wildlife and the local community.

Witness: taking political action for systemic change

Friends from across the Area Meeting were arrested for protesting peacefully at the DSEI Arms Fair in London, and were active in national Extinction Rebellion strikes. Bradford on Avon Meeting hosted and fed members of the XR March on its way from Cornwall to London.

Living faithfully: changing our lifestyles

Without a Meeting House, Trowbridge, Chippenham and Frome Friends focus on changing their own lifestyles in small ways that might encourage others. Chippenham

Friends have been keeping records of how they arrive at Meeting which has provided an encouraging baseline measurement to work from. Trowbridge Friends use *Ethical Consumer* magazine to guide their choices. Frome Friends are developing ways of tracking energy use and improving their carbon footprints.

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 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 document 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 College.

In 2019 WWESAM Trustees attended training provided by a local firm of solicitors (Stone King, in Bath) on

subjects of interest to trustees and charities. 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 met six times in 2019, alternately in Meeting Houses and in each other's houses, sharing a simple supper first, which helps us to know each other better. We also spent time together in a Strategy Day at Bradford on Avon Meeting House in July, reflecting on our practice and discerning how we could improve our work as Trustees for the Area Meeting.

Property, employment and other management

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

Trustees agreed a scheme with the Charity Commission for all the properties held by AM at the end of December 2019. This scheme details the legal basis on which properties are held by the Charity. Friends Trusts Ltd is the Custodian Trustee for all properties held by the Charity and none are permanently endowed.

In 2019, Trustees continued to attend to all the management matters recorded in the 2018 report. We continued to support Bath Local Meeting over its decision to sell its Meeting House because it no longer meets Bath Friends' needs as a Meeting House. The marketing of the Meeting House for sale was launched in early January 2020

Safeguarding

Safeguarding was on the agenda of every meeting of Trustees. No incidents were reported during 2019. At the request of AM Elders, Overseers and Fellowship Group Convenors, two Elders led a session on loneliness and how it may make adults vulnerable. In turn that led Bradford on Avon Friends to organise a discussion on hearing impairment, the ways in which loss of hearing may lead to isolation, and how Local Meetings can address the issues in practical and pastoral ways. Our safeguarding documents were revised to take into account changes in contact details but we did not review the policies in their entirety. Britain Yearly Meeting has announced plans to issue completely revised model safeguarding documents drawn up in consultation with Thirtyone:Eight (previously the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service): our policies should be reviewed in 2020 in the light of this new advice.

End of year update from West Young Friends' Action Network (WYFAN)

The BYM Legacy funded Quaker Youth Development Project continued to work with young people (aged 11-18) across Bristol, North Somerset and West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meetings. Kirsty Philbrick, the Youth Development Worker, works with local Quakers of all ages (through the Local Support Group) to devise, plan and offer activities for young people.

So far 31 young people have been involved and a real sense of community is developing. Young people say they enjoy and value the group: 'I had a brilliant time'; 'It's an

escape from the pressures of school and space to be who I am, with no “fronts”. The project is still embryonic and has much work to do in broadening its reach; geographical and beyond people linked to Quaker Meetings.

Monthly ‘Young Friends’ Friday’ at Meeting Houses across Bristol are the building blocks of the community – young people play games, share dinner, delve into a social/environmental/spiritual issue and worship together. Events in 2019 included going to hear Greta Thunberg in Friends House, contributing to a performance in Refugee Week, supporting individuals on school climate strikes, ‘Quaker Any Questions’ and a weekend camping at Hill House (Cotswolds) and many more besides.

So far, the majority of activities, young people and Quaker Meetings involved are in Bristol, with a few travelling from Bath and Sidcot. We plan to venture out in 2020, and have built some great links with participants at the Youth Work Training Day, which lead us to Bath, Weston and Sidcot.

The future of the project will be shaped by young people and the Local Support Group and the Youth Worker in response to opportunities that arise locally to make the youth project part of the wider Quaker community and offer more inspiring and diverse events to young people.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

GDPR issues are a standard agenda item at Trustees’ meetings. No data breaches were recorded this year.

Finance

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

The dominant feature for our 2019 financial position was the effect of the delayed marketing of Bath Meeting House. This has meant that our costs increased while we ceased lettings while waiting for the sale to proceed. Setting this point aside, the pattern of activities across the Area Meeting (and financial expenditure) was similar to that of previous years.

Donations from Members and Attenders continued at similar levels to previous years, supplemented by lettings from the other Meeting Houses.

During 2019 we researched which computer programs other Quaker Meetings were using for their accounts and sought professional advice. We have started using Quickbooks alongside our current system. This has proved successful, and we hope will lead to faster and easier availability of financial information, and greater flexibility for the future. We also agreed to begin to pay a book-keeper from 2020.

We continue to monitor our finances to ensure that reserves held are at acceptable levels.

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

We closed our account with the Bootle branch of Santander in 2019, as we streamlined the financial work for Frome Meeting.

Our insurers

Congregational & General Insurance plc, Currer House,
Currer 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 sent representatives to national and international conferences and workshops on Quaker social and peace concerns and invited speakers to our Meeting Houses. Trustees actively encourage all Friends in the Area Meeting 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.

Our Area Meetings normally conclude with a talk or a group activity. In 2019 these were:

- Barney Rosedale and Bill Yates on how society deals with addictive drugs (3 March)
- Group activity on Inspirational Quakers (6 June)
- Cora Gallagher on being a Quaker prison chaplain (10 October)
- Kirsty Philbrick on the Youth Development Project (10 October)

- Marigold Bentley of Quaker Peace and Social Witness (1 December)

Our Membership and Attendance numbers show a slight decrease, and are set out in the following table.

Year	Members	Attenders	Total
2013	174	131	305
2014	175	141	316
2015	181	120	301
2016	187	130	317
2017	190	131	321
2018	192	133	325
2019	189	124	313

The Area Meeting website www.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)

Kate Macdonald, editor

Bath

2019 was been dominated by our expectation that we were about to sell Bath Meeting House on York Street, and then realising that we needed to wait until a knotty



legal point was clarified by the Charity Commission. We settled into our new temporary home in rooms at the Central United Reformed Church on Grove St, and have enjoyed

Meetings for Worship there, in warm and cheerful surroundings. We have made friendly connections with our hosts, and participated in events in the church, with our upcycled hazel bough tree made by our Children's Meeting for their Christmas Tree Festival, and by selling our greetings cards at the church's shared coffee morning.

We gave our tenants notice and vacated the York Street Meeting House in March, and held a Leaving Day on 31st March to mark the end of Quakers' long association with the building: Bath Quakers have met there since 1866. We anxiously waited as the months went by, as the management and legal bills mounted, and still our AM Trustees had received no word from the authorities. But the year ended happily with the requisite letter being received two days before Christmas, which enabled us to look ahead to 2020 knowing that we could put the building on the market at last.

We have maintained the low carbon footprint that Friends create when travelling to and from Meeting by remaining in the centre of Bath near good bus and train connections. We are helping to use the URC's investment in heating their building by using two rooms several



times a week. Our commitment to sustainability as a Meeting is in abeyance until we have the responsibility of a building of our own again, if we should discern this.

Our other concern as a Meeting this year has been a most positive and fruitful one, with increased attention being paid to the Bath Burial Ground, its maintenance, upkeep and conservation, and how we should be using it. Susan Tomes and Laurence Tindall are the core of the new Burial Ground Gardening Group, and have achieved great advances in helping us understand the ground, and the decisions that we need to make for its future.

Our Young Friends have been active in the Youth Development Project, and take part in the Young Friends' Fridays held in Bristol.

We continued to support Friends as a Sanctuary Meeting, by donating money individually and as a Meeting for the salary of the Friends House Sanctuary worker, by writing letters to the authorities over wrongful detention, providing the household goods for a family of refugees, and supporting our Friend Diana Page in her voluntary teaching role with local refugee families.

During the year our Friend Ali Morgan gave us a presentation on girls' education at Umm al Khair in Palestine, and the work of UK Friends of Hebron International Resources Network. We agreed wholeheartedly to support the Network's application to QPSW for a grant, and made a special collection for this.

We joined Quaker Council for European Affairs in their dispersed online Meeting for Worship on the evening of 29th March 2019 to mark another stage in the UK's separation from the European Union.

On 24th April we supported and helped to produce a Climate Emergency Hustings in the lead-up to the local elections, 'to flex all our Testimonies: Peace, Equality, Simplicity and Truth'. This deepened our spiritual engagement with Friends' commitment to sustainability, and made stronger connections with our community.



In September our Clerk was arrested for her participation in the peaceful protest at the DSEI Arms Fair in London.

Between April and June we held six afternoon meetings on the theme of Open to Transformation, repeating the successful evening meetings that we had held in 2018. This led to the experiment of a Spirituality Book Club. We also continued our series of intermittent Quiet Days, with a Quiet Day on 31st August at the Old Barn at Kelston.

On 17th September in Quaker Week we held an evening of sharing our Quaker stories.

We experimented with a wreath of white and red poppies for Remembrance Day, and laid it at the War Memorial in Victoria Park with representatives from many other organisations, but once again our wreath was stolen a day or so later.

On 29th December, it being the fifth Sunday in the month, we experimented with an all-Elders Meeting, which was enjoyed by all present, feeling ourselves to be more connected with how our Meeting is run, and how we can share in its work. This is reflected in much of the business in our Meetings for Worship for Business for this year, in which our concerns with how we organise ourselves and share the work of Meeting, in our many committees and groups and rotas, are considered again and again. Much of this reshuffling and reassessing may be due to being in a temporary home. We look forward to having greater clarity on our future in 2020.

Bradford on Avon

Three new members have been welcomed and there have been several new members from other Meetings, and attenders. We have recorded the deaths of one member and one attender. Several of our Members serve on Area and National committees.

Our Children's Meeting continues happily and we all benefit from their presence at the beginning and end of Meeting for Worship on Sundays.

The numbers of children coming to Meeting have increased. The children come into the beginning our

Meeting for 10 minutes each Sunday and then have their own activities with someone on their rota list. There is a Children's and Young People's Committee. All Friends on the children's rota have the DBS certificate.

We have enabled two families to attend a weekend conference at Woodbrooke Quaker College on 'Families in the Society of Friends'.

Mothers of our children are preparing a blog of Quaker biographies and people both contemporary and historical who have inspired Quakers, to use as a resource with the children.

In our Meeting Pastoral Care and Oversight is fulfilled through the four Fellowship Groups. Each group meets regularly for shared meals or activities. Their eight conveners also meet to discuss the ways they assist their members.

We hold an outdoor meeting every July: Meeting for Worship followed by games for the children in Barton park.

Our young families organised two Give and Take Events in the Meeting House for swapping of clothes and toys and bric a brac. This has proved very popular, with good attendance by local families.



We provided overnight accommodation and breakfast for members of the Extinction Rebellion March on its way from Land's End

and Wales to London. Several members and attenders participated in local and National XR strikes in September and October.

One of our members arranged the visit of Journeymen Theatre with their production 'Rock and a Hard Place' on the subject of domestic abuse. It was open to anyone in Bradford on Avon.

We support the Food Bank at the HUB in Bradford on Avon, which provides help for the homeless and others in need of benefits and debt advice.



The tenants of our Studio Flat spend much devoted time in our garden, so that we were able to open it to the public for Bradford on Avon Secret Gardens Trail in June; several hundred people visited.

Every year we participate in the local Schools visit when pupils from St Laurence Secondary School visit churches in Bradford.

We now have a Local Meeting Facebook page set up by our warden Klaus Huber, as well as a website. Klaus has attended the 'Managing Meeting Houses' course at Woodbrooke in September.

With sustainability at the forefront of its work, our House Committee has overseen secondary glazing being fitted in the warden's flat. The car park has been resurfaced with an additional cycle stand fitted and a reduction in car

parking spaces. The Meeting House's electrical repairs and modernisation are up to date. Our warden ensures that we comply with best practice in fuel consumption and insulation. We are working towards the A Rocha gold award for Eco Churches.

In April Klaus led us in a Meeting using the Experiment with Light format, on the subject of Privilege, which was to be the major topic at Britain Yearly Meeting 2019. Other Meetings were invited.

We use a 'Worship Sharing' format on 5th Sundays.

We held a led workshop on loss of hearing and problems of isolation and loneliness. This was well attended by equal numbers of those with hearing loss and those without.

We were delighted to be part of the marriage of two of our members, Christopher Arnold and Deborah Jane, in the Meeting House in April.

We are members of Bradford on Avon Churches Together. Some of our members take part in Remembrance Day, a Lent Course, and planning for World Day of Prayer and an Advent Carol service.

We support the local Sabeel World Wave of Prayer.

We hold special Charity collections each month accompanied by talks about the charity to inform us of their work.

Chippenham

2019 has been a quiet and steady year for Chippenham Meeting. We have two new attenders so although we

are still a small Meeting we feel strengthened. We continue to share all Meeting tasks with everyone contributing as they are able, which seems to work well.

We have continued to meet regularly for Bible study in a Friend's home and for shared lunches, but because we are a small Meeting we find we are able to support and care for each other in less formal ways also. Our newsletter goes from strength to strength and is another way of keeping in touch with Friends no longer able to attend Meeting whether they have moved away or are physically unable to attend. Home visits also help keep these Friends up to date and part of our Meeting. It is also a way to keep in touch with a Friend who works abroad for much of the year. Earlier in the year we joined with Devizes Meeting to watch the Swarthmore lecture preceded by Meeting and shared lunch and followed by tea and cakes. Just before Christmas we had a Meeting for Worship followed by carols, poetry and mince pies. As always, the sharing of food is an important way for us of getting together and relaxing!

Earlier this year we decided to take out a subscription to *The Friend* using some money which had been left to our Meeting with instructions to do something enjoyable! This is very welcome to Friends unable to take out their own subscriptions and is another way to remember our Friend. Again this year we laid a white poppy wreath at Chippenham War Memorial as a silent witness to all those who have died or suffered in all wars. We are also part of Chippenham Churches Together.

Our Friend Cora Gallagher has completed her three-year tenure as Quaker Prison Chaplain at HMP Erlestoke on behalf of Area Meeting but has agreed to continue for

another three years. She goes into the prison once a week as part of the Chaplaincy Team and currently supports two people who attend the monthly Quaker Meetings. Cora is still supported by two Friends from Bradford on Avon and Frome Meetings which she very much appreciates.

As a Meeting we continue to support the Chippenham Food Bank and Chippenham Street Pastors on a regular basis but have also collected for Amnesty International and Doorway among other organisations. Also as individuals we continue to be involved with QSAIG (the Quaker South Asia interest Group) and one of our Meeting is responsible for this group's newsletter, the Quaker Lesbian Group, Doorway, Calne Clean Up, Grandmentoring, Amnesty International and Facing Africa. We all try to live out our Quaker conviction in other small ways, one Friend for example, engaging with people when he goes for a pint at his local.

We are aware as a Meeting of our responsibilities towards sustainability but as we do not have a Meeting House our actions tend to be individual and we try to live our lives sustainably by, for example, reducing the use of fossil fuels in our homes and trying to use our cars less and public transport or walking more. We were encouraged when we kept a record of how Friends arrived at Meeting each week to see that most people walked, with the few car journeys made by those no longer able to walk or who live too far away and not on bus routes. Three Friends have attended local meetings on living sustainably and we are hoping in the coming year to meet regularly to discuss ways in which we could do more.

We are looking forward to the year ahead with faith and optimism and taking great strength from our fellowship within our own Meeting and as part of Area Meeting.

Devizes

The Meeting House and garden have had a busy year. Hire of the building has been very buoyant. One reason has been the reduction in the number of venues in the town, good for us but offering less space for local activities. We continue to attract organisations wanting a peaceful venue for sensitive meetings. As a result, the income from hirings has helped us to cover the cost of work needed, including replacement of the fuse box



panels and the chairs in the Meeting Room.

We achieved the A Rocha silver Eco Church award last year and continue to work on this and share ideas with churches in the town.

Working for gold will be more challenging. The garden has been a focus with the

installation of a bug hotel for us by a group of local Beavers. The path along the canal bank has been improved for safer access. We are encouraging the growth of wild flowers and our tenant is feeding the birds.

During Quaker Outreach Week we hosted a talk by Professor David Waltham (Earth Sciences, Royal Holloway, University of London) on 'Lobbying for System Level Change' in conjunction with Sustainable Devizes

which we support by hosting their meetings. Several of our Quaker members are also actively involved.

A member from Devizes co-ordinated a visit to the Centre for Alternative Technology in September 2019 which was attended by eight members of the area meeting and the chair of Sustainable Devizes. This proved to be an enjoyable and stimulating few days.



Our solar PV array has been operating for a year now and is beginning to give a return on the investment.

We have held two Fairtrade coffee mornings during the year in support of Traidcraft. As in previous years, members have been involved with local charities, particularly the Food Bank and Open Doors (homeless support) and as a meeting we have supported them both financially and practically. We have also hosted meetings of the Palestine Support Group.

During the afternoon of Remembrance Sunday, we laid a wreath of white poppies at the war memorial and stood in silence for a short time.

We have had a further change in tenancy of the flat above the Meeting House. Angela Washington has moved on and we have welcomed Karen Walker. We have been fortunate to have tenants who are also either members or attenders. Sadly, our Friend, Max Greenwood died after illness and we held a memorial meeting for him in January. He is much missed.

Looking forward, we are planning to show the 2019 Swarthmore lecture in March and have invited other meetings to join us.

As with many meetings, we are finding that the capacity of members to take up roles is limited. We have held a threshing meeting to consider how we can become a closer community as well as cover all the roles required. In connection with this we plan a day led by Woodbrooke on the Road in July to help us deepen the spiritual life of the meeting.

Frome

Frome Meeting has had a deal of sadness this year. Two much loved members died unexpectedly. One was an elder, our treasurer and a long time Quaker; the other a gentle eccentric, who had a wonderful eye for charity shop chic and whose life embodied our testimonies. We miss them both greatly. But a longstanding attender came into membership, which was a joy.

Our regular activities have continued and developed. The breakfast discussion groups are well attended as well as

the monthly midweek evening Meeting for Worship which attracts those not always able to attend on Sundays. There is also a monthly Light group. We have had varied discussions after Meeting for Worship, one of which was led by a young Friend on the subject of the trade in palm oil. Some Friends have also shared their spiritual journeys. One Friend is also a member of the Meeting at HMP Erlestoke, supporting the Quaker Prison Chaplain, and a young Friend attended Junior Yearly Meeting. Our clerking team continues to organise and run our business meetings. We held our first all-age meeting for worship followed by a shared lunch before Christmas, which was a moving and joyous occasion. We consider that developing the spiritual life of our meeting is all encompassing.

As our membership gets older, our Nominations group is finding it harder to fill Elder and Oversight roles so our pastoral care group is currently looking at other ways of working.

The Key Centre, where we meet, was taken back by Somerset County Council in April and there have been some teething problems. We no longer have access to the room where we held the Children's Meeting and the rent has substantially increased. But we have worked hard via our liaison person to establish a relationship with the council and the children continue to meet in the spacious foyer. In spite of not owning the building we try to implement sustainable practice as far as we are able. Over the next few years we will be looking at further ways of tracking our use of energy and improving our carbon footprint, individually and as a Meeting.

storage containers, we disposed of several chairs that have been gratefully received by a local church.

Trowbridge

Friends, this missive is full of thankfulness.

Thanks first to The Hub's fire-book kept throughout this year, the completion of which tells us with some accuracy that we are an average of 7.3 people each Sunday. It has helped us be aware of our habit of irritation with an increasing number of administrative procedures (the Hub is basically a one-room, ground-floor community centre, with three outside doors) but also awareness of other's situations, in which protection could be life-saving. Our clerk is thankful to have had the encouragement from our Area Meeting membership clerk to ask Friends how they would wish their gender to be recorded, which has relieved increasing discomfort in guessing. Similarly, General Data Protection Regulations have provided opportunities to clarify people's wishes about what and how their details are recorded, how and whether these are to be shared. These may seem to be small steps in diversity awareness, but vital in developing the quality of



our sensitivity and the way we do community, both within and outside our Quaker group.

We have continued to open each Sunday (with the

organised exception of June 9th) for Meeting for Worship, providing a short reading from Quaker writing as well as writings from other quarters for greater richness. Our meetings are largely silent, but there can be two or three pieces of spoken ministry on some days. There can be as many as 12 people, or as few as two. On one Sunday in August the two worshippers retired to a local coffee outlet after meeting for better quality beverages! On another occasion, the ninth person had sat down on the last seat in the circle, when they spotted another person approaching The Hub, and swiftly arranged for an extra chair. When the circle was expanded for a third time several people gave ministry in the form of laughter and it felt great to begin meeting for worship in that spirit of shared delight.

We are thankful to keep in touch with migrated Friends in Findhorn and Northumberland, for our frequent and regular visitors from other local meetings, and for all those serving in the Area Meeting who make our meeting possible and connect us with wider Quaker life and organisation.

Janet Sturgeon, one of our Elders, leads occasional sessions over coffee about one of the Quaker Testimonies, when we are able to share our different approaches and listen to each other. We sometimes also have a Friend offering their 'spiritual journey' which is always moving and stimulating. On the Sunday before Christmas we had the usual 'half and half' meeting – half an hour's silence, followed by half an hour punctuated with any reading or song or offering people felt moved to give. This was varied and powerful.

Many of us attended the showing of the Swarthmore Lecture in Chippenham meeting by Devizes Meeting, and are thankful to be able to meet and share the experience. In June we met for a short day in Ammerdown, led by our Friends Katie Evans and Meredith Freeman, who are experienced Quaker workshop leaders, and this gave us a chance to review our spirituality and its meaning in our lives, and to share this with each other. In July we were happy to attend the opening of the Westbury Quaker Burial Ground by the Lions and their Youth group, the Leos, and a network of local community groups.

We have provided financial support to various Quaker initiatives during this year, and our presence in The Hub supports the upkeep of the venue for residents in the local area. We also subscribe to *The Friend* and *Ethical Consumer Magazine* to better inform our personal decisions on sustainability, since we do not have our own Meeting House.

Faced with the inevitable round of nominations in the autumn we were and are astonished to have emerged with a full complement of able Friends to fulfill each role, including having a librarian for the first time in years.

In this time of uncertainty, flux and division, we keep returning to the silence in which there are no borders, and which helps reconnect us with our deepest longings, our strengths and, hopefully, with each other. And, after a cup of tea, to go out into the world with greater openness.

Location of our six 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

Email: info@wwesquakers.org.uk