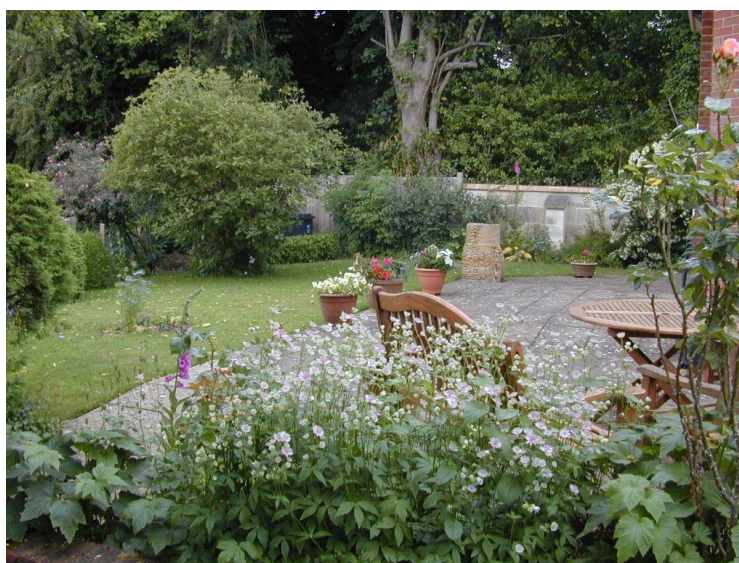


Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

**West Wiltshire & East Somerset
Area Quaker Meeting**

Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts 2023



The garden at Devizes Quaker Meeting House

West Wiltshire & East Somerset Area Quaker Meeting

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

Registered Charity Number: 1134534

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Status, Trustees & Custodian Trustee

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Quaker Meeting is one of around 70 Area Meetings which make up The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, also known as Britain Yearly Meeting. It is an unincorporated charity (registered number 1134534) and has existed in its current form since November 2008.

The Trustees serving during the period from 1 January 2023 up to the date on which this report was adopted were:

- Chris Arnold (Bradford on Avon), appointed 1 January 2024
- Robin Brookes (Devizes), ended 8 June 2024
- John Flynn (Devizes), appointed 9 June 2024
- Nicola Grove (Frome), appointed 1 January 2023
- Sally Harris (Bath), Clerk
- Angela Le Grice (Bradford on Avon), ended 31 December 2023
- Debbie Nightingale (Chippenham)
- Chris Pollock (Trowbridge)
- Barbara Ridhiwani (Bath), Treasurer, appointed 1 January 2023

Custodian Trustee:

- Friends Trust Limited, 173-177 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ

The term *Friend* refers to a Member of the Society. The term *Attender* refers to a person who is not a Member of the Society but who regularly attends its meetings for worship.

This report of the Trustees naturally speaks for our Area Meeting and its six constituent Local Meetings. *We* and *our* therefore generally mean those in that wider group, except in the appended reports from our Local Meetings where they generally mean those in the Meeting in question. Where appropriate, it is made clear that these plurals indicate the Trustees specifically.

Charitable object

The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Society in the region of West Wiltshire & East Somerset Area Meeting and beyond.

These purposes are carried out in ways that bring public benefit, and we Trustees ensure that we have due regard to the Charity Commissioner's guidance in this respect.

Meeting together

The right holding of public meetings for worship (in our constituent Local Meetings) and regular meetings for church affairs (in all the constituent Local Meetings and for the Area Meeting as a whole) forms a key part of our role in providing a public benefit.

Meetings for worship

Public meetings for worship are held every Sunday. They take place in our meeting houses at Bradford on Avon and Devizes, and in rooms that are rented in Bath, Chippenham, Frome, and Trowbridge, where we do not have premises. The arrangements are made by our six Local Meetings. Some hold additional meetings for worship at different times of the week and in different venues from normal. One of our local meetings held several Sunday meetings for worship outdoors during spells of warmer weather.

Our meetings for worship are open to people of all ages, but from time to time we offer some that are specifically designed to be “all-age” meetings for worship where programmed elements are included.

Across our Area Meeting, some meetings for worship are also held entirely online, while some are a blend of in-person and online. This arrangement, started during the Covid-19 pandemic, continues to be particularly valuable for those whose ability to come together in one place is more limited.

Meetings for church affairs

Meetings for church affairs take place regularly in each of our six Local Meetings and at Area Meeting. At these meetings, we gather in a spirit of worship to make practical decisions about running our meetings and, for those matters which require more consideration, to discern what is in right ordering. The unity we seek in a discipline of silent waiting depends on our willingness to seek the truth in what others say, and so to reach a sense of the right way forward—a practice that we find is different from the secular idea of consensus.

At each Area Meeting, we consider the appointment of role-holders and receive reports from our representatives and from Trustees, exercising discernment throughout. We also receive a report from our Membership Clerk and consider any applications for membership. In 2023, three people applied for, and were accepted into, membership. We received two transfers-in to our Area from other Area Meetings. Sadly, these increases were matched by one transfer-out, two resignations and two deaths.

Each year, we summarize the changes in the numbers of Members and Attenders across our six Local Meetings (see Figure 1, below).

In 2022 we noted that the number of Members was the lowest in ten years, and for 2023 we note that it remains at that same lowest level. And while the proportion of Members within the total of Members and Attenders has risen (to 58.5% from 53.5%

the year before), this has only happened because of a significant drop in the number of Attenders. The 120 Attenders in 2023 are also an equal-lowest figure in ten-years, apart from the 117 encountered in 2020— which should perhaps be discounted as anomalous in the first year of Covid lockdown. We continue to find it difficult to fill roles within our Meetings, especially where these must be filled by Members.

Post-Covid, and the disruptions that the pandemic wrought across our communities, we are conscious of the need to think about the opportunities and threats that the future may bring, as well as reflecting on how our strengths and weaknesses may affect our future.

Year	Members	Attenders	Total
2014	175	141	316
2015	181	120	301
2016	187	130	317
2017	190	131	321
2018	192	133	325
2019	189	124	313
2020	*186	117	*303
2021	†178	124	†302
2022	169	147	316
2023	169	120	289

* Under-reported by 2 in the Report for 2020 but correct here
 † Over-reported by 1 in the Report for 2021 but correct here

Throughout the year, all our Local Meetings have sought to reflect on our future, with a view ultimately to discerning how best we might use our financial resources from the sale in 2023 of Bath Friends Meeting House. This process has been shaped by an Enquiry Steering Group set up by the Area Meeting Trustees (see Figure 2, below).

It is our practice to arrange an event or activity, or to invite a speaker, for the second half of each Area Meeting after the business has been concluded. Speakers were invited on two occasions in 2023.

- Jenny Allott, Secretary to the Quaker Housing Trust, gave a presentation on the work of the Trust. The Quaker Housing Trust was set up by Yearly Meeting in 1967 to take forward Friends’ concerns on housing and homelessness. Since then, using donations from Friends, Quaker Housing Trust has provided grants and loans for social housing projects for those in genuine housing need. Small to medium-size charities have also been supported to create housing for people at points of transition in their lives, for example arriving as refugees and asylum seekers or recovering from addiction. After Jenny’s presentation to us, the Area Meeting agreed to donate £15,000 to the Quaker Housing Trust.
- We heard from three members of the public who are involved in non-violent direct action in response to the climate crisis. We recognized this is a contentious issue on which different Friends have different views. Our aim in the session was to open a space for us to listen to one another’s concerns, deepen our understanding of others’ actions and so reflect in a new way on our own positions. We heard about their involvement in non-violent direct action, such as Just Stop Oil. All emphasised that being in possession of the facts was critical. Following their

testimonies the Meeting broke into small groups to share responses and reflections. Feedback from the groups was then received by the Meeting as a whole.

The average attendance at Area Meeting in 2023 was approximately thirty-two. At our final Area Meeting in 2023, we decided to change our current practice of appointing new clerks on each occasion of Area Meeting. A clerking team has now been appointed to serve from 1 January 2024. We hope this will help to improve continuity as we look forward to our future.

Figure 2: The following extracts from a document presented by the Enquiry Steering Group in March 2023 give a good indication of our aspirations.

Looking forward, imagining our future

We know how good it feels to have returned to being together, face to face, in our Meetings for Worship—and that we've learned to use other means to allow Friends to join in who would not otherwise be able to be present in person. *Quaker Faith & Practice* 2.57 gives a sense of that togetherness combined with new challenges:

to all, waiting in expectancy, at moments and in some measure is given a sense of the living touch of God. At such moments there may come the kindling of mind and heart which impels obedience to speak under the immediate promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is the ministry of inspiration, the prophetic ministry in the true sense, when the spoken word pierces to the heart of our relationship with God, unveils the living presence of Christ in the midst of the worshipping group and in its separate members, opens to our sight the way we must tread if we would realise that Spirit in and through our ordinary daily activities and find the creative response to the challenges of our time.

It feels natural to look forward again, post-pandemic, and to consider the ways in which we can look after ourselves in our own Quaker communities, be part of our wider social communities, and to contemplate our Quaker witness in the world around us.

Our Area Meeting Trustees, with the agreement of Area Meeting, have set up an Enquiry Steering Group to help us in this—not as a group to *deliver* something new, but to provide prompts and some structure for the reflective process. There are two Trustees in the group [...] and other Friends from across our Area Meeting [...].

We are seeking to develop a set of queries, designed as open questions about our future. We expect this process would involve leading Friends through these queries over several months. Friends in Local Meetings and Area Meeting would come together periodically to reflect, to consider one or more of the queries, and to seek the way forward for our Area and Local Meetings.

There are two specific opportunities that are triggers for this Quakerly quest:

- a) For the first time, we have a share in a member of staff employed by Britain Yearly Meeting to be a Local Development Worker.
- b) We also have the proceeds from the sale of Bath's Meeting House.

Together, these could provide unprecedented openings to meet needs and develop our life and witness in Local Meetings (Bath, Bradford on Avon, Chippenham, Devizes, Frome, Trowbridge) and in the Area Meeting as a whole.

Charitable activities

Our charitable activities are grounded in worship together and follow from discernment, in our meetings for church affairs, of the actions we should take. They take place across the Area Meeting, often carried out in our Local Meetings. Separate reports from each of the Local Meetings towards the end of this document give a good flavour

of the life and activities in our communities in 2023. As Trustees, we receive updates at each of our meetings to keep us informed.

Friends and Attenders in Bradford on Avon used the foyer of the public library for an exhibition during Quaker Week entitled *What kind of world would you like to live in?* In Devizes, the opportunity was taken during Quaker Week to invite a class from a local school to the Meeting House. During their visit, the children heard a short talk and participated in a discussion about Quakers ending with a short Meeting for Worship.

Many of our local meetings join in the laying of a white or a mixed poppy wreath on Remembrance Sunday. Friends engage with the event organisers beforehand, if possible, to explain that white poppies symbolise both military and civilian victims of war. Devizes Friends hold a weekly peace vigil in the centre of Devizes and the Bath Stop War weekly peace vigil is supported by Friends living locally. We also hear of individual Friends who are involved with anti-war campaigning and protest.

Quakers in Britain have had a longstanding involvement with prison work and concern for matters relating to criminal justice. One of our Members is a prison chaplain at HMP Erlestoke. Our Area Meeting provided the funding for her to attend the Quakers in Criminal Justice Conference.

Sustainability is a concern for many Friends and Attenders across the Area Meeting. Bath Local Meeting held two five-session series of Eco-Together meetings which were well attended. The sessions, devised by a Bath-based environmentalist, covered energy, transport, food and resources, and included positive steps for responding to climate change. The Meeting also carried out a travel survey to coordinate transport to Area Meeting and reduce fossil fuel use.

Both our meeting houses have received an Eco Church Silver Award. Solar panels at Devizes have been providing renewable energy to the Meeting House for the past five years. We have also been taking steps to enable the addition of solar panels at Bradford on Avon.

Friends and Attenders are aware of the climate emergency and have taken steps to reduce their carbon footprint. A Devizes Friend participated in the Climate Justice Gathering weekend organized by Woodbrooke. Others are individually involved with the groups working on ecological and greening activities in their communities including Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon, Sustainable Devizes, Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil.

Local Meetings make voluntary collections for Quaker, and other, charities as part of our overall charitable activities. Of course, many Friends and Attenders in our meetings are also individually involved in other charitable and community activities that are not part of our Area Meeting. Often these are other examples of Quaker faith in action, and in many cases those Friends and Attenders will be cared for and supported by others in our Meetings.

The Area Meeting owns a Burial Ground in a residential area of Bath. It is made available to the local community as a quiet space and a gentle form of outreach. Burials no longer take place. An area of the garden is provided where ashes may be scattered. Printed leaflets on the outside wall about Bath Quakers and the Burial Ground are available for members of the public who are interested to learn a little about the Quakers. The leaflets include a contact number for those wishing to visit and see what lies behind the wall.

Children and young people

There is an active children's meeting at Bradford on Avon Local Meeting with planned activities each week. From time to time, the children are taken out on Sunday morning to the garden of a Friend living nearby. The children's meeting is often enriched by families from local meetings where provision for children is less frequent or not possible.

Our young people between the ages of eleven and eighteen have benefited greatly from the enthusiastic presence of a regional Youth Development Worker employed by Britain Yearly Meeting. First Kirsty Philbrick then Zephyr Blofeld have encouraged our young people to form bonds, to play together and gradually "come to know each other in the things that are eternal". They have met up for walks, picnics, camping, baking, lantern-making, an apple festival, and a "Light the Night" event.

We were glad to fund a young Friend from Bath Local Meeting to attend *Facilitation and Leadership 2023*, a weekend conference for finding out how to facilitate activities for other young Quakers.

Senior Conference and Junior Gathering provide further opportunities for young Friends to meet others. Two of our young people attended Junior Gathering in 2023. Those of us with personal experience of such occasions know how valuable they are, and we are glad that our young Friends are sharing that experience.

Zephyr Blofeld's responsibilities span three area meetings including ours. The current three years of funding for his regional activity ends during 2024 and the Trustees of all three have agreed to continue to provide funding for a further three years.

Work behind the scenes

Much of our work as Trustees is carried out behind the scenes. It involves caring for Friends and others to whom we have a duty of care, looking after property, checking on rental premises, and managing our finances.

We held eight routine meetings of the Trustees in 2023, four of which were online. We also met for a Strategy Day.

Caring for Friends and others

Our new Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Resources was adopted by Area Meeting early in 2023 following a long and careful period of consultation and discernment. The Area Meeting Safeguarding Coordinator subsequently visited each Local Meeting in turn, taking time to explain the procedures and help Members and Attenders to understand what is needed for our current safeguarding arrangements. Individuals also took part in online safeguarding training with the safeguarding support organisation, Thirtyone:eight.

We had no safeguarding incidents to report in 2023.

We were responsible for looking after two employees in 2023: our Warden at Bradford on Avon, and our Meeting House Manager at Devizes. Both held regular meetings with the Area Meeting Supervisor of Employees, which provided an opportunity for confidential discussion about any matters which they wished to raise.

Our employees are paid at a rate which is above the living wage pay-rate and is reviewed annually. We also review our pay rates for others who provide services for us and are satisfied that their rates are above the living wage pay-rate.

Caring for Friends and Attenders includes proper handling of the personal data held by Area Meeting and its six Local Meetings. This is a legal requirement under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

No data breaches were recorded in 2023.

Our responsibilities include caring for those who live in our meeting houses. We have a tenant at Devizes and both a warden and tenants at Bradford on Avon. Necessary work at the Devizes Meeting House during the year was carefully scheduled to cause minimum disruption to our tenant.

Looking after property

The two meeting houses have their own local committees to deal with routine matters relating to their premises, with Trustees being responsible for commissioning any more complex and costly work.

Both the neighbouring properties which adjoin our land at Devizes have trees growing on or near the boundary. These had become a risk to our property, in particular to the high retaining wall on the east side. A considerable amount of time was taken up during the year in correspondence and negotiation regarding the trees and vegetation on the boundaries before agreement was reached and the necessary work safely carried out by the landowners.

Major work to replace a 30-year-old waste-water pump and associated electric system at Devizes Meeting House was completed satisfactorily using a local firm.

Through Wiltshire Council's *Solar Together* scheme, we obtained a quote from an installation company to install solar panels on the roof of Bradford on Avon Meeting House. The property is classified as non-residential, such that we were obliged to seek planning approval to position the panels for maximum effect. This was granted early in 2024. We have also commissioned a roof survey to check what enabling work may be required.

Internal and external redecoration was carried out at Bradford on Avon Meeting House, as recommended by the quinquennial survey, and the side entrance door was replaced with a watertight door.

The new shelter in Bath's Burial Ground was completed in the spring of 2023 providing us with both a practical and attractive facility. We were very pleased with the work of our contractor. She described the end result as "a locally sourced, low impact, hand crafted, accessible shelter, which will last at least 35 years, over twice that of a treated timber kit design". The garden is maintained by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable self-employed gardener, and by volunteers from Bath Meeting with support from Grow for Life and Good Gym, two local charities whose members help with heavier work and enjoy coming to the garden.

At the end of 2023, a decision was taken to experiment with employing a manager for the Burial Ground as it was proving difficult to appoint a volunteer Burial Ground Steward from within Bath Local Meeting. We hope this new post will enable the continuing development of the garden as a tranquil space and for outreach to the local community.

The Trustees are responsible for ensuring that health and safety matters are properly handled. As is our normal practice, we audited the systems and processes at both meeting houses and were satisfied that good care is being taken. A risk assessment for the Burial Ground was also carried out and followed up.

Checking on rental premises

Bath, Chippenham, Frome, and Trowbridge Local Meetings use rented rooms for their meetings. Trustees check the risk assessments which are provided by the premises managers as part of our annual health and safety audit.

There have been no changes in 2023 to the venues hired. However, Frome Local Meeting is hoping to find premises where it would be possible to hold children's meetings, as their current venue has insufficient space.

Managing finance

The Trustees are responsible for managing the finances of the Area Meeting and its six Local Meetings. At each Trustees' meeting, we receive an up-to-date report from the Bookkeeper and the Area Meeting Treasurer summarising the financial affairs across the Area Meeting.

We operate with centralised bank accounts such that all receipts and payments authorised by Local Meetings go through the Area Meeting bank accounts. Our Bookkeeper sends regular finance reports to Local Meeting treasurers so they can exercise control over their funds and take decisions on expenditure, within agreed financial parameters.

We drew up and agreed a process for taking some decisions using emails between our routine Trustees' meetings, recognising that such decisions are necessary from time to time, typically in cases where there is some urgency in considering a quotation for work to be undertaken.

In previous years, our Area Meeting funds have been deposited in accounts held with two different banks, with Trustees taking the view that this was appropriate and safe, given the level of funds held at the time. These circumstances changed significantly following the sale of the Meeting House in Bath at the end of March 2023. Holding a much larger cash balance necessitated a review and update of some of the bank mandates and of our system for moving and reporting on larger amounts. An account was also opened with a third bank.

Trustees sought guidance from other Quaker Area Meetings with significant reserves and researched short-term options for investment or earning interest. We agreed an investment policy and met with two ethical investment companies before selecting one to place the funds with for the time being. As our Area Meeting was in the early stages of developing ideas for use of the money, we have not chosen at this stage to lock into either medium- or longer-term investments whose value could either rise or fall.

Since our Area Meeting charity is not incorporated, the practical investment arrangements have been made through our custodian trustee, Friends Trusts Ltd, a separate charity (registered number 237698) set up alongside Britain Yearly Meeting to assist non-incorporated UK Quaker charities such as ours. With its help, we were able to invest our reserves cash early in 2024 in the Epworth Cash Plus Fund, a fund for liquid assets that pays over 5% interest, at present. The fund is low risk as it spreads its funds across many banking institutions internationally.

Epworth Investment Management was originally set up by the Methodist Church for its internal investment. It is an ethical investment company with a policy of engagement with institutions with which it is involved. However, the banking institutions in which the Cash Plus Fund invests do not themselves claim to be ethical and Trustees are aware that we are accepting a level of compromise at this time. We would not intend to keep all of the investment in this Fund in the longer term.

Trustees are aware that significant further work and further learning and advice will be needed in due course when there is more clarity about what our Area Meeting intends for its future. We will also review the situation if international interest rates fall back from their current levels, which are much higher than has been usual since the 2008 international financial shock.

We reviewed our reserves policy accordingly, to allow for these additional funds to be held while beginning to discern what Friends and Attenders may need and want for our Area Meeting in the future.

Annual accounts for 2023

The full accounts are set out on pages 18-26.

Trustees are pleased to report an overall surplus this year of £1,099,624 (2022: £56,271; 2021: £32,093, 2020: £897). This is a very healthy position for our charity and is the result of the successful sale of Bath Friends Meeting House (BFMH) at the end of March 2023, following two years of leasing to the intended purchaser under a contract arrangement developed during the pandemic. The building had been marketed in early 2021 after Trustees and members of Bath Local Meeting concluded that it no longer met our needs, being too large and unwieldy to manage as a listed building, particularly as available volunteer time was continuing to fall.

Income

Total Income in 2023 was £1,260,959, (2022 £158k, 2021 £169k, 2020 £112k, 2019 £118k).

£1,134k of this unusually large income total relates to the sale of BFMH to Topping & Company Booksellers Ltd. Our contract with them was for lease then sale, by 31 March 2024 at the latest. At their request, the sale took place a year earlier on 31 March 2023. The sale price (£1,466k) was significantly higher than the notional value of the building previously held in our accounting system (£330k), and all the excess therefore appears in the 2023 income figures as a one-off 'gain on the sale'. Most of this income is considered 'Restricted' as the Charity Commission expect us not to spend the capital unless buying another Quaker Meeting House, unless we apply to the Commission to remove this restriction. Further details are included in the notes to the accounts.

Having received the sale proceeds a year earlier than expected, the Trustees took actions to earn interest on the sum. We took time to investigate the steps necessary to achieve a larger return while keeping our investment arrangements as ethical as we could, and at low risk. This was a learning curve and included two interesting online meetings with investment companies. Income from interest received was £19,317 in 2023 compared to £423 in 2022. From early 2024, the cash was placed in Epworth Cash Plus Fund where it will earn a larger return.

Rental and lettings income in 2023 was just under £50k compared to £89k in 2022, since in 2023 we received only three months' rent from Topping & Company Booksellers Ltd under the agreed contract, prior to the completion of the sale. Our remaining Meeting Houses at Bradford on Avon and Devizes enjoyed lettings income similar to pre-Covid times. We are grateful to our Warden & Bookings Manager who have worked patiently to achieve this.

We note that regular giving from Friends & Attenders in 2023 is markedly lower (at £56k) than in the preceding three years (2022 £67k, 2021 £72k, 2020, £70k). Analysis showed that this is the result of both lower numbers of givers and lower average levels of giving. Trustees believe this is due to rapidly increasing costs of living leading to lower disposable incomes, and perhaps the knowledge that our funds have been boosted by the sale of the meeting house. Trustees will observe what happens to donations income in 2024.

Expenditure

Total Expenditure in 2023 was £161,335 (2022 £102k, 2021 £137k, 2020 £111k).

The major items of expenditure this year have been the legal and estate agent fees relating to the sale of Bath Friends Meeting House (£17k), repairs and running costs of £39.4k (£21.1k in 2022) including a replacement for the sewage pump system at Devizes Meeting House (£10.6k), redecoration at Bradford on-Avon Meeting House (£5.5k), and a replacement door necessary to prevent occasional flooding (£4.8k). There were also works to remedy damp issues in the flat attached to Devizes MH. There was some limited expenditure on tree maintenance at Devizes, but higher costs were avoided. After much evidence-gathering and correspondence, Trustees succeeded in getting neighbouring land-owners to remove a row of around twenty fast-growing young trees near the boundary, that appeared to have been neglected and whose growth threatened to make unsafe the high retaining wall above the meeting house car park.

Other expenditure included a £15k additional donation to Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), the national Quaker body (£10k in 2022), This helped to offset the decrease in annual giving allocated by individual donors to BYM which fell from £33.0k in 2022 to £27.7k in 2023. We also made a donation of £15k to the Quaker Housing Trust.

We contributed £8k to BYM to support the Youth Development Worker for our area plus Bristol and North Somerset Area Meetings. This covered the full year in 2023, whereas in 2022 we only paid for four months due to the post being vacant for a time.

As usual, we supported a number of Friends and Attenders to attend conferences and training, both online and in-person. Topics included safeguarding, trustee training, prison ministry, church financial management, leadership training, spiritual nurture, and training for Quaker Registering Officers (for weddings). Some of our young people were supported to attend Junior Gathering, one of the national events for Quaker teenagers.

Reserves

Trustees recognise the need to hold cash reserves, sufficient to meet both normal expenditure in the Area Meeting together with any unexpected expenditure that might arise. Following examination of the 2022 accounts, our Trustees reviewed the reserves held to ensure they are still at acceptable levels. Following that process we were able

to recommend two £15,000 donations from our unrestricted fund, as noted above. This was approved by Area Meeting as recorded in Minute 23.65.

We ended 2023 with £254,634 of available 'Reserves' (Net Current Assets) in our Unrestricted Fund. This is an increase from £237,505 at the end of the previous year.

We ended 2023 with £1,426,233 in Restricted Funds, of which £19,999 relates to the Frome Building Fund and £1,406,234 relates to the sale of Bath Friends Meeting House. Note 9 and Note 14 in the Accounts give details regarding accounting for the sale and the calculations behind the Restricted Fund values.

Governance and administration

Governing document

The charity was originally registered in 2010, constituted by the Governing Document of North Somerset & Wiltshire Area Quaker Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain (adopted 9 November 2008). On 5 June 2011, the Governing Document was amended to reflect the change of name to West Wiltshire & East Somerset Area Meeting, after a change in its constituent Local Meetings. Following a decision taken at Area Meeting on 27 June 2021, it was further amended to allow meetings for church affairs to be held solely online or combined with those attending in-person.

On 22 January 2020, West Wiltshire & East Somerset Area Meeting agreed a Scheme with the Charity Commission that clearly established the governance responsibilities of the Area Meeting for the three meeting houses owned at that time (Bath, Bradford on Avon, and Devizes) and the Bath Burial Ground. As the Area Meeting is not an incorporated charity, Friends Trusts Ltd is named in the Scheme as the Custodian Trustee for the Area Meeting and its assets. The title deeds to the properties are held by Friends Trusts Ltd.

Trustees' appointment and training

Trustees are Members of the Area Meeting, appointed by the Area Meeting following nomination by the constituent Local Meetings.

Before any nomination is made, the Clerk to the Trustees obtains two references with an emphasis on financial integrity, one from within the Religious Society of Friends and one from outside. The nominee completes the probity declaration based on the Charity Commission's pro-forma confirming that they are a fit and proper person to oversee financial, governance and employment matters in the Area Meeting. The nominee is also required to sign the necessary Safeguarding declarations.

Two new Trustees joined us at the start of 2023 and a third joined at the start of 2024. The Clerk to the Trustees ensures that new Trustees understand their terms of

reference, have access to past Minutes and to key documents, in particular the Governing Document and the Handbook for Trustees of Quaker Meetings.

Trustees receive notice of any upcoming courses and webinars and are encouraged to attend those that are relevant. Several Trustees also participate in the e-forums and sessions run by Britain Yearly Meeting where information and ideas are shared and discussed.

Bankers

- CAF Bank Ltd, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, ME19 4JQ
- Triodos Bank UK Ltd, Deanery Road, Bristol BS1 5AS
- The Co-operative Bank p.l.c., 1 Balloon Street, Manchester, M60 4EP

Investment manager

- Epworth Investment Management Ltd, 9 Bonhill Street, London, EC2A 4PE

Insurers

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

Examiner of accounts

- Hannah Pettifer ACA, OCL Accountancy, 141 Englishcombe Lane, Bath, BA2 2EL.

Looking ahead

The Enquiry Steering Group was laid down in March 2024, having fulfilled the purpose for which it was set up. Friends and Attenders had engaged deeply with the process described earlier in this report, and responded with ideas about the ways in which the Area Meeting might move forward. These included developing our Quaker presence and addressing the needs in our communities, with the benefit of our newly available funds. We Trustees have asked the Area Meeting Clerking Team to join us in considering the responses at our annual Strategy Day. We intend that this should consider wider questions about our future as well as addressing questions about the use of the greater financial resources now available to us after the sale of the Bath Friends Meeting House.

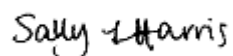
We can already see that developing our Quaker presence means, in part, developing our web presence. Our Area Meeting has recently joined the Quaker Meetings Network and is benefitting from its guidance in creating a new website. We hope this will open new avenues of outreach for our Area Meeting. We hope also to give further consideration to the best use of our Local Development Worker and Youth Development Worker, roles which are shared with neighbouring Area Meetings.

During the year, we became aware of area meetings which are grouping together in various ways to share the workload of Trustees, as legislative and compliance

demands become more complex. We are currently involved in exploring such a possibility for ourselves, following an approach from Bristol Area Meeting to three of its adjacent area meetings. This offers yet another opportunity for collaboration between Quaker communities in our region.

We welcome the engagement with thinking about our future, and the opportunities that additional financial resources and staff may bring in their wake. We find that we have much in common with our neighbouring Quaker Meetings and are heartened by this as we look forward.

This report was approved by the Trustees on 16 August 2024
and signed on their behalf by

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a loop at the end of the name.

Sally Harris, Clerk to the Trustees

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, West Wiltshire & East Somerset Area Meeting (the Trust) for the year ended 31 December 2023.

Responsibilities and basis of the report

As the charity's trustees, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Hannah Pettifer ACA OCL Accountancy 141 Englishcombe Lane Bath, BA2 2EL

Date: 23/08/2024.....

Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023

Statement of Financial Activities for the year ending 31 December 2023

		Unrestricted Fund	Restricted Funds	2023 Total Funds	2022 Total Funds
	Notes	£	£	£	£
Incoming Resources					
Voluntary Income - Donations and legacies		58,326	-	58,326	68,420
Investment income		18,951	366	19,317	423
Other income		49,689	-	49,689	88,976
Total Income from Charitable Activities		<u>126,966</u>	<u>366</u>	<u>127,332</u>	<u>157,820</u>
Gain on Sale of Bath Friends Meeting House	14	-	1,133,627	1,133,627	-
Total Incoming Resources	3	<u>126,966</u>	<u>1,133,993</u>	<u>1,260,959</u>	<u>157,820</u>
Resources Expended					
Charitable activities					
Quaker work		144,170	-	144,170	100,758
Other (Depreciation)		-	-	-	791
Total Expenditure on Charitable Activities		<u>144,170</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>144,170</u>	<u>101,549</u>
Fees re Sale of Bath Friends Meeting House	14	-	17,165	17,165	-
Total Expenditure	4	<u>144,170</u>	<u>17,165</u>	<u>161,335</u>	<u>101,549</u>
Net income (loss) on ordinary activities	9	(17,204)	1,116,828	1,099,624	56,271
Transfer between Funds	14	(289,772)	289,772	-	-
Net income after Transfers between Funds		(306,976)	1,406,600	1,099,624	56,271
Reconciliation of funds					
Total funds brought forward		1,289,878	19,633.19	1,309,511	1,253,240
Total funds carried forward	9	<u>982,903</u>	<u>1,426,233</u>	<u>2,409,135</u>	<u>1,309,511</u>

Continuing operations

All income and expenditure has arisen from continuing activities.

Balance Sheet at 31 December 2023

		Unrestricted	Restricted	2023	2022
	Notes	Fund	Funds	Total	Total
		£	£	Funds	Funds
				£	£
Fixed Assets					
Tangible assets	6	728,269	-	728,269	1,052,373
Current Assets					
Debtors	7	14,221	-	14,221	14,806
Cash at bank and in hand		285,530	1,426,233	1,711,762	255,271
		<u>299,750</u>	<u>1,426,233</u>	<u>1,725,983</u>	<u>270,077</u>
Creditors					
Amounts falling due within one year	8	(45,116)	-	(45,116)	(12,939)
Net current assets		<u>254,634</u>	<u>1,426,233</u>	<u>1,680,867</u>	<u>257,139</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>982,903</u>	<u>1,426,233</u>	<u>2,409,135</u>	<u>1,309,511</u>
Net Assets		<u>982,903</u>	<u>1,426,233</u>	<u>2,409,135</u>	<u>1,309,511</u>
Funds					
Unrestricted funds				982,903	1,289,878
Restricted funds				1,426,233	19,633
Total funds	9			<u>2,409,135</u>	<u>1,309,511</u>

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 16 August 2024 and signed on its behalf by:

Barbara Ridhiwani - Trustee and Treasurer

Barbara Ridhiwani

Sally Harris - Trustee and Clerk to Trustees

Sally Harris

The notes form part of these financial statements

Notes to the financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2023

1 Employees

The average number of employees during the year was 2.

2 Accounting policies

Basis of preparing the financial statements

The financial statements of the charity, which is a public benefits entity under FRS 102, have been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS 102) *Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (effective 1 January 2015)* and the Charities Act 2011. The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

Income

All income is included on the Statement of Financial Activities once the charity has entitlement to the funds, it is probable that the income will be received, and the amount can be measured reliably.

Expenditure

Liabilities are recognised as expenditure as soon as there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to that expenditure, it is probably that a transfer of economic benefits will be required in settlement, and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably.

Expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and has been classified under headings that aggregate all cost related to the category. Where costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings they have been allocated to activities on a basis consistent with the use of resources.

Grants offered subject to conditions which have not been met at the year end date are noted as a commitment but not accrued as expenditure.

Cash at Bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

Debtors

Debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid.

Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will normally result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount.

Tangible fixed assets

The valuation of the meeting houses is subject to review. The Trustees consider that insured replacement cost is an unsuitable valuation basis because it does not reflect current values. Nor is the open market value considered appropriate for property held for Quaker-supported work. Recognition of underlying value at £350,000 each for the two remaining meeting houses plus £20,000 for the burial ground site in Widcombe, Bath gives a total of £720,000.

Depreciation is provided on any 'plant & machinery' additions to the buildings at 25% on reducing balance in order to write off each of such assets over its estimated useful life. 'Improvements to property' are treated in the same way as 'land and buildings' with no depreciation being charged since it is assumed repairs and replacements will maintain the value of the property at the current book value or more.

Costs of equipment and fittings such as boilers, radiators, pumps and electrical systems, pipes, drains, windows and doors are not capitalised where such items are integral to the building and they simply replace or upgrade a pre-existing system or equipment. These costs are instead included in current year expenditure under 'property costs'.

Going concern

In the opinion of the Trustees, the charity continues to be a going concern.

Taxation

The charity is exempt from tax on its charitable activities.

3 Income

		2023	2022
		£	£
Donations and Legacies		58,326	68,420
Deposit account interest		19,317	423
Rental and Lettings Income		49,689	88,976
Sub-total		127,332	157,820
Gain on Sale of Bath Friends Meeting House	note 14	1,133,627	-
Total Income		1,260,959	157,820

Donations from Members and Attenders in 2023 were on average lower and from fewer donors than in 2022. The increase in Deposit account interest reflects the capital receipt generated from the sale of Bath Friends Meeting House which was deposited in our interest-bearing Reserve Account on an interim basis. Rent was received up to the date of sale under a lease agreement signed in 2021 and ending on 31 March 2023.

4 Expenditure

		2023	2022
		£	£
Warden & Lettings Manager	note 13	13,849	12,339
Fees, rents, taxes		7,843	6,034
Insurance		3,370	2,697
Repairs & running costs		39,351	21,139
Life of the Meeting		15,543	9,423
Donations to Quaker charities incl BYM	note 11	58,774	43,491
Donations to individuals and Non Q charities	note 11	450	415
Governance Costs	note 12	4,990	5,219
Depreciation on Plant & Equipment		-	791
Sub-total		144,170	101,549
Fees relating to Sale of Bath Friends Meeting House	note 14	17,165	-
Total Expenditure		161,335	101,549

Life of the Meeting expenditure was higher in 2023 mainly due to the restarting of the Youth Development Worker scheme.

Repair costs were higher in 2023 as these included £10,600 to replace the sewage pump system at Devizes Meeting House, together with £4,800 to replace a door and £5,600 for redecoration at Bradford on Avon Meeting House.

Depreciation in 2022 related to the mobility access lift at Bath Friends Meeting House which was sold with the building.

Trustee Remuneration

During 2023 Trustee Debbie Nightingale acted as a self-employed bookkeeper for our Area Meeting. Her fees for 2023 totalled £3,143 (2022 : £3,394) and are included in accounting. Her hours are capped at 25 per month and are normally fewer.

Trustee expenses

Trustees' reimbursed expenses of £1,159 (2022: £949) were paid to four trustees and are included in Quaker work in the Statement of Financial Activities. These cover training course fees and reimbursement of incidental expenses.

5 The role of volunteers

Practical voluntary service is at the heart of all our Quaker Meetings, at local, area, and at a national level. All Friends and Attenders take part. There are many opportunities, including welcoming at the meeting house door, assisting with the running and clerking of meetings for worship, serving on working groups for the care of premises, pastoral care, working with our young people, as well as trusteeship, and representing our area on national bodies.

6 Tangible fixed assets

	Freehold property £	Improvements to property £	Plant and machinery £	Totals £
Cost				
At 1 January 2023	1,050,000	-	31,601	1,081,601
Additions in year	-	8,269	-	8,269
Disposal in year	(330,000)	-	(31,601)	(361,601)
At 31 December 2023	<u>720,000</u>	<u>8,269</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>728,269</u>
Depreciation				
At 1 January 2023	-	-	29,228	29,228
Disposal in year	-	-	(29,228)	(29,228)
At 31 December 2023	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Net Book Value				
At 31 December 2023	<u>720,000</u>	<u>8,269</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>728,269</u>
At 31 December 2022	<u>1,050,000</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>2,373</u>	<u>1,052,373</u>

The improvement to property relates to a shelter constructed in the Burial Ground on a concrete base, with a paved pathway leading to the doorway.

7 Debtors: amounts falling due within one year

	2023 £	2022 £
Trade debtors	9,160	11,100
Other debtors	4,833	173
Prepayments	228	3,533
	<u>14,221</u>	<u>14,806</u>

Trade debtors comprise gift aid to be claimed (lower in 2023) and lettings income due.

Other debtors for 2023 include deposit interest received in January 2024 in relation to the cash held following the sale of Bath Friends Meeting House.

Prepayments in 2022 include the insurance premium for 2023. The 2024 premium was not prepaid.

There were no closing debtors relating to the restricted proceeds of the sale of Bath Friends Meeting House.

8 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2023 £	2022 £
Suppliers paid after year-end	5,729	6,214
Donations owed to Britain Yearly Meeting	7,741	4,526
Area Meeting approved donations:		
To Britain Yearly Meeting	15,000	-
To Quaker Housing Trust	15,000	-
Funds to pass over (Acting as Agent)	125	249
Rent received in advance	-	550
Accrual for Examination & Payroll	1,522	1,399
	<u>45,116</u>	<u>12,939</u>

There were no closing creditors relating to the restricted proceeds of the sale of Bath Friends Meeting House.

9 Movement in funds

	At 01.01.23	Net movement in funds	Transfers between funds	At 31.12.23
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General fund	1,289,878	(17,204)	(289,772)	982,902
Restricted funds				
Bath Friends MH Fund	-	1,116,462	289,772	1,406,234
Frome Building Fund	19,633	366	-	19,999
Sub-total Restricted funds	19,633	1,116,828	289,772	1,426,233
Total funds	1,309,511	1,099,624	-	2,409,135
		Incoming resources	Resources expended	Movement in funds
Net movement in funds included in the above are as follows:		£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General fund		126,966	(144,170)	(17,204)
Restricted funds				
Bath Friends MH Fund		1,133,627	(17,165)	1,116,462
Frome Building Fund		366	-	366
Sub-total Restricted Funds		1,133,993	(17,165)	1,116,828
		1,260,959	(161,335)	1,099,624

Additional note on Fund Accounting

The former book value of the Bath Friends Meeting House, plus the Gain on the Sale of Bath Friends Meeting House, less the costs associated with the Sale are being shown as a 'Restricted Fund'. This follows earlier correspondence between our Area Meeting's solicitor and the Charity Commission intended to clarify the legal situation of the property, based on documentation over 100 years old. Correspondence covered questions of whether Trustees were entitled to sell it and whether they would be free to use the proceeds for our charity's general purposes.

A 'Scheme' agreed with the Charity Commission in early 2020 confirmed the property was not held as 'permanent endowment', and trustees were entitled to market and sell it, however the trustees were advised to retain the proceeds and use only interest earned, unless buying another Meeting House. Trustees would be able to apply to the Charity Commission to loosen this restriction at a later date if needed. This was acceptable to Trustees at the time in order to be able to make progress on selling the property, especially as there was no specific plan for the use of the sale proceeds at that time.

The Frome restricted fund represents an amount originally set aside from the general fund by the Trustees for the purposes of purchasing a meeting house in Frome. In recent years there has been little progress with this project.

The remaining funds are the combined unrestricted funds of the constituent local Quaker meetings which can be used in accordance with the charitable objectives, at the discretion of the Trustees.

10 Related Party disclosures

The work on the Burial Ground Shelter built during the year cost £8,269. This was undertaken by Rowena Bashforth who occasionally attends Bradford on Avon Quaker Meeting. More than one quote was sought for the project before the contract was agreed.

11 Grants and Donations paid

	2023	2022
	£	£
Individuals		
Grant to enable attendance at young people's event	-	125
Institutions		
* Britain Yearly Meeting via annual giving	27,741	33,026
Britain Yearly Meeting additional donation	15,000	10,000
Quaker Housing Trust	15,000	-
Other Quaker charities (14 payments in 2023)	1,033	465
sub-total to Quaker charities	58,774	43,491
Non Quaker charities (5 Non-Q charities)	450	290
total	59,224	43,906

* Donations via annual giving are included in these accounts, as Gift Aid is claimed by Area Meeting. A part of these donations is then passed to Britain Yearly Meeting according to the donors' instructions.

	2023	2022
	£	£
Acting as agent collections:		
Quaker charities	498	285
Non Quaker charities	175	588
	672	873

These amounts flow through Area Meeting bank accounts, but do not form part of these accounts.

12 Governance & Accounts remuneration

	2023	2022
	£	£
Bookkeeping services (see note 4)	3,143	3,394
Payroll services	442	404
Independent Examination Accounts	1,081	989
Accounts software subscription	324	431
	4,990	5,219

13 Staff Costs

	2023	2022
	£	£
Staff remuneration:Warden & Lettings Manager	12,700	11,198
Council tax paid for Warden's flat	1,150	1,094
Expenses relating to supervision	-	48
	13,849	12,339

Employee numbers during the year were 2 (2022: 2). Total 0.61wte for 2023 (2022: 0.62wte).

In both 2023 and 2022, the charity claimed the Employment Allowance against the employers Class 1 NICs, which covered the full liability to HMRC.

There were no employee benefits, other than statutory employer pension contributions. No employee had employee benefits in excess of £60,000 (2022: Nil).

14 Sale of Bath Friends Meeting House, York Street, Bath

Notes relating to the sale process and prior leasehold agreement

a) The highest bidding potential purchaser was chosen, following a competitive bidding process. The purchase price exceeded the Surveyor's valuation obtained in advance of marketing.

b) Trustees were confident that the purchaser was appropriate, and not in conflict with any Quaker principles.

c) Contracts were exchanged in March 2021, early in the Covid-19 pandemic, and for reasons including economic uncertainties, the Parties agreed that the intended purchasers would occupy the building under a leasehold arrangement, while proceeding with alterations, and would pay all building maintenance, utilities and insurance costs in the interim. It was further agreed that the sale would be completed by 31 March 2024

at the latest. In the event, the purchaser requested to complete the sale a year before the deadline and this took place on 31 March 2023.

d) The rental income received in 2021, 2022 and 2023 from the intended purchaser has been added to our charity's Unrestricted Fund, and, like the interest received on the sale proceeds, is available for use for our general charitable purposes.

Gain on Sale

	£
Proceeds of sale of Bath Meeting House	1,466,000
less book value of the property	(330,000)
less depreciated value of mobility access lift	<u>(2,373)</u>
Gain on sale of Meeting House realised in 2023	1,133,627
less professional fees* re sale completion incurred in 2023	<u>(17,165)</u>
Gain on sale less costs incurred in 2023	<u>1,116,462</u>
less professional fees* incurred in prior years	
2019	8,935
2020	15,416
2021	18,250
2022	<u>-</u>
	<u>42,601</u>
Gain on sale less all related costs	<u>1,073,861</u>

*Professional fees include:

- i) legal fees relating to the sale process;
- ii) legal fees to achieve clarity with Charity Commission regarding legal entitlement to sell the Building;
- iii) estate agent fees re marketing the building and running a competitive bidding process;
- iv) surveyor fees re a confidential report to trustees on the building and its estimated value prior to marketing process. This is a legal duty for all charities, aimed to ensure fair value will be obtained for charity beneficiaries when a property is sold.

Meeting House Restricted Fund

Spending of the 'gain on sale' less all related costs is restricted, as explained in note 9. However, accounting transactions relating to the property and its sale were not treated as restricted in prior years. This has been adjusted in the 2023 accounts as follows:

		£
Transfers from Unrestricted to Bath Friends MH Restricted Fund		
Book value of property		330,000
Depreciated value of mobility access lift		2,373
Professional fees incurred in prior years, in relation to the sale		<u>(42,601)</u>
Total Transfers between Funds in 2023	(note 9)	289,772
Add Gain on sale less costs incurred in 2023	(see above)	<u>1,116,462</u>
Total Bath Friends MH Restricted Fund at end of 2023	(note 9)	<u>1,406,234</u>

Detailed Statement of Financial Activities for the year ending 31 December 2023

	2023	2022	2021	2020
	£	£	£	£
INCOME				
Voluntary Income				
Annual giving donations	56,146	67,426	71,871	70,478
Donations	2,180	994	12,650	1,602
Legacies	-	-	2,000	2,000
	<u>58,326</u>	<u>68,420</u>	<u>86,521</u>	<u>74,080</u>
Investment Income				
Deposit account interest	19,317	423	64	433
Charitable activities				
Grants	-	-	-	1,330
Other income				
From properties, rent etc	49,689	88,976	79,350	23,157
Gain from sale of Bath Friends MH	1,133,627	-	-	-
From Local Authority Grants	-	-	-	10,000
HMRC Job Retention Scheme	-	-	3,264	3,365
Total income	<u>1,260,959</u>	<u>157,820</u>	<u>169,198</u>	<u>112,365</u>
EXPENDITURE				
Charitable activities				
Warden's & Manager's pay	13,849	12,339	12,480	12,633
Fees, rents & taxes	7,843	6,034	2,073	4,739
Insurance	3,370	2,697	3,424	8,806
Repairs & running costs	39,351	21,139	22,985	23,498
Life of the Meeting	15,543	9,423	8,800	3,823
Grants to Quaker charities incl BYM	58,774	43,491	35,942	34,241
Grants to individuals and Non Q charities	450	415	100	1,190
Fees relating to the Sale of Bath Friends MH	17,165	-	18,250	15,416
Repayment of Bath Meeting House Appeal	-	-	26,304	-
	<u>156,345</u>	<u>95,539</u>	<u>130,358</u>	<u>104,346</u>
Other				
Depreciation of plant & machinery	-	791	1,055	1,406
Support costs				
Governance costs				
Examination & accountancy	4,990	5,219	5,692	5,717
Total resources expended	<u>161,335</u>	<u>101,549</u>	<u>137,105</u>	<u>111,469</u>
NET INCOME	<u>1,099,624</u>	<u>56,271</u>	<u>32,093</u>	<u>897</u>
	2023	2022	2021	2020

This page does not form part of the statutory financial statements

Reports of the life of our Local Meetings in 2023

Bath

2023 began with the sad news of the deaths of two of our oldest and longest-standing Friends and Attenders, who are still missed. We attended Memorial Meetings for them both in Kelston Roundhill Barn. We also welcomed an application for membership from a former Member and longstanding Attender. In addition to our Sunday morning Meeting for Worship at Manvers Street Baptist Church and the Tuesday evening online Meeting for Worship, one worshipping group and two fellowship groups also met regularly. Our practice of holding monthly shared lunches after meeting for worship was reinstated, providing a further opportunity for fellowship.

In 2023, we did a lot of work towards implementing the new Safeguarding policy. We agreed to change the name of Overseers to Pastoral Friends. We agreed that the Care of Bath Meeting group—which we set up in the first year of lockdown and reinstated in 2022 as a way to manage the Meeting’s administration—should take on the work of our local Nominations Committee, in the continuing absence of a Nominations convenor. We continued to develop new ways of managing the necessary work with a small group of Friends willing to take on multiple roles.

The Bath offshoot of the Area Meeting Enquiry Steering Group did a great deal of preparation work on ‘whither Quakers in Bath?’, planning meetings for learning, threshing and discernment to take place in 2024. This was all designed to help us discern the future of Quakers in Bath and the best way forward to achieve our aspirations.

The Burial Ground took up much of our time and energy. Our Burial Ground Steward had unavoidably to step down halfway through the year, and this revealed just how much work had been quietly done in the background. As none of us felt able to take on this role, we decided that the best way forward would be to recruit a Burial Ground Manager to maintain and develop this space, now the only property in Bath owned by Quakers. Advertisements were placed at the end of the year. The Burial Ground Shelter was completed and is a magnificent success. We were able to hold one Meeting for Worship there before the summer weather ended. We engaged a part-time gardener to help with the work of the Gardening Group, which also dwindled in numbers towards the end of the year.

Two Friends from our team of children’s volunteers were prepared to hold a children’s meeting on every second and fourth Sunday but family attendance on Sundays has, sadly, been infrequent.

Two Friends attended the Spiceland Summer Settlement at Uffculme, hosted by West Somerset Area Meeting, and several Friends attended Woodbrooke in-person retreats and courses online. One Friend, acting on her Quaker pacifist concern, was arrested in London at an arms fair demonstration and is awaiting a court hearing.

In furtherance of the Meeting's commitment to sustainability, two small groups followed the Eco Together programme, consisting of six and seven Friends in each group. Eco Together is a five-session, small-group programme, created by a Bath-based environmentalist. The first introductory session established our Quaker concern for the Earth and each other, which grew as we shared our experiences. The following four sessions were themed on energy, transport, food and resources. Each session involved a discussion around four powers that individuals can use: lifestyle, advocacy, communication, and community. The programme provides a comprehensive Information Pack, and detailed Activity Sheets offering positive steps for responding to climate change. It was well received and everyone found something new that they could commit to.

Bradford on Avon

Bradford on Avon Local Meeting continues to be a vibrant and quite large Meeting. Attendance on Sundays exceeded 30 adults in the Meeting House several times in 2023, with other Friends joining on Zoom, and children. We continue to meet in a blended format every Sunday and frequently welcome Friends from other Local Meetings who join us online on those Sundays when their own Local Meeting does not offer a Zoom or blended option.

We were pleased to welcome one of our regular Attenders into membership. The list of new Attenders keeps growing. Our oldest Attender died at the age of ninety-two, just days after having still been part of our meeting for worship via Zoom.

Our mid-week Meeting for Worship on Wednesday evenings remains small but steady. Occasions when the welcomer stays on their own continue to be rare.

Children's meetings were offered every single Sunday throughout the year, mostly at the Meeting House and occasionally outdoors at Frankleigh House garden. The first Sunday without children during the year was at the end of May—though there were plenty of children at a vineyard in the afternoon (see below). One family moved abroad in the summer, and we did have a few more Sundays during the rest of the year when no children turned up. On the other hand, both our meeting for worship and our children's meeting are frequently enriched by families from other Local Meetings, now that we have become the only Meeting in our Area Meeting that offers a children's meeting every Sunday.

Our outdoor meeting for worship, planned for July, was rained off. In September we welcomed our regional Youth Development Worker and a group of young people to our premises. Following lunch and games in the Meeting House, they headed on to the Bradford on Avon Apple Festival in the country park.

The biggest highlight of the year was a Quaker wedding on the afternoon of Sunday 28 May, held outdoors at Avonleigh Orchards & Vineyard at the northern end of Bradford on Avon. Over sixty people, including many children, attended the happy

occasion, which was blessed with perfect weather and much birdsong during the meeting for worship.

Our four fellowship groups kept meeting regularly and are gearing up for a reshuffle exercise in early 2024. The Healing Group also continued to meet, usually online.

Our elders were again busy organising sessions after Sunday Meetings. In 2023, these included one on our peace testimony (held on New Year's Day), two sessions on Quaker structures, and two sessions on the topic of reparations arising from Yearly Meeting 2022.

Other events to note were one last performance from Journeymen Theatre at St Margaret's Hall in March, another give-&-take event in September, and a Quaker exhibition on the topic "What kind of world would you like to live in?" in the foyer of the Public Library during Quaker Week.

Several Friends continued to be active in campaigning. One Friend once more spent a lot of time on her bike to raise money to support projects in Palestine. Others went to protest against the DSEI arms fair in London, where two of our Members were arrested. Another Friend kept being involved with Just Stop Oil, following previous involvement with Insulate Britain, and was given a suspended prison sentence later in the year.

Our Meeting House continues to be used a lot for Area Meeting activities. Three of four Area Meetings during the year were held in Bradford on Avon now that our Area Meetings are blended. However, it was decided that Area Meetings should be held in different locations again. If necessary, Area Meeting will pay for suitable venues. We have offered to provide the mobile parts of our blended meeting gear where appropriate.

Room hire picked up during 2023 and is now similar to pre-2020 levels, although the main meeting room remains somewhat underused.

The 'warm space' offering we started in November 2022 was withdrawn in early February, owing to low take-up.

Our Warden was kept very busy in the summer, thanks to the installation of a new side entrance, an extensive redecoration programme, and Wiltshire Council's Solar Together scheme. The project to install solar panels on the Meeting House roof has become more complex than anticipated and is still work in progress.

Several Friends continue to be involved in Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon, Extinction Rebellion, and Just Stop Oil. Realizing that Friends are not in unity about the methods of XR and JSO, we decided to invite speakers from JSO to give brief personal testimonies during our December Area Meeting, as a way of starting a discussion on this topic.

Our newsletter has featured many environmental hints and tips and a series of reports about our newsletter editor's travels around several European countries, with a particular focus on simplicity and resilience. In November, our Local Meeting for church affairs decided to sponsor a climate café by waiving the hire charge for their meetings that are designed to address climate anxiety. They will be starting in the new year, and several Friends are involved in this initiative.

Chippenham

Although Chippenham Meeting continues to be small, we are not as small as we once were, with more regular Attenders now joining us. It is a joy on a Sunday morning to look around the circle and see Friends of long standing and of new. During the past year we have also held several meetings for worship at a Friend's farmhouse where we can sit in the open-sided barn and enjoy the quiet of the countryside broken only by the song of the birds.

We have held several shared lunches, often preceded by a discussion. One such was discussing the question of the money raised by the sale of Bath Meeting House. We also enjoyed sharing lunch with Sally Harris when she came to speak to us about Safeguarding, and recently with a representative from The Leprosy Mission who gave a very interesting and moving talk. Earlier in the year, we joined with Devizes Meeting to see the Swarthmore lecture, an annual event to which we look forward. Again this was preceded by a shared lunch—and followed by tea and cakes. Most recently, we met at a Friend's for meeting for worship, lunch and sharing of an item—poem or prose—which meant something to us. One Friend brought the harp he had made and entertained us—a gentle and peaceful sound.

Food seems to feature rather a lot for Chippenham Meeting but it does perhaps offer a relaxed time in which we can enjoy Friends' company and support those who may find it easier to open up in less formal situations.

The Bible Study group continues to meet regularly and is much valued by those able to attend. We also enjoy the newsletter compiled by two of our number which helps keep in touch with Friends who are not able to attend meeting for worship regularly.

The Cause, which was the original Quaker Meeting House in Chippenham, was opened this year for Heritage Days and we had a display there about Quakers and our Meeting in particular.

One Friend is the Quaker Chaplain at Erlestoke Prison. In our recent Interfaith Week, she gave a talk about Valerie Taylor, a very special person who is a great example of interfaith working in Bangladesh.

Another Friend works in Bangladesh and recently sent us the following: *I'm working in Dhaka again, and some of my office colleagues weren't born when I first came here. So I'm trying hard not to be a fusty old bloke! I'm working on transport planning projects, and Dhaka was recently acclaimed as the slowest world capital (due to traffic*

congestion), and also is regularly among the world's top five cities for air pollution. Sometimes team members, including me, feel discouraged that our proposals and recommendations aren't acted upon. But we keep trying. In our office we have Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, possibly Shinto (I haven't asked), and other faiths, and we all get along fine and with respect for each other. There are not many Quakers in Bangladesh; I haven't come across any in recent years, but then I don't circulate much beyond work. Quaker South Asia Interest Group focuses on South Asia, including Bangladesh, and we are encouraged to check out their website.

In previous years, Chippenham Meeting has been able to lay a white poppy wreath at the War Memorial after the conclusion of the official town ceremony. We decided that this year we would ask again to be included with other local organisations and to this end two Friends met with the Chairman of the Wiltshire Royal British Legion branches. We had a very friendly and positive meeting and left having been reassured that he could see no reason why we should be excluded. Unfortunately we received an email shortly afterwards informing us that this would not be possible. We were disappointed but laid our wreath as usual after the ceremony. Sadly, less than a week later our wreath disappeared from the War Memorial which has not happened before.

As individuals we contribute to the life of our Meeting in whatever way we can, and also to the life of our wider community. We continue to support community lunches and the Chippenham Street Pastors and try to live out our Quaker conviction. We also try to live our lives in as sustainable a way as possible, ever mindful of our responsibility to the planet and all life on it.

We look forward to the year ahead, taking strength from the fellowship we enjoy in our own Meeting and the wider Area Meeting.

Devizes

There are regularly between six and nine people attending our mid-week meeting for worship which is appreciated by those who attend. Sadly, our membership is increasingly frail and unable to attend meetings due to their own health or because they are caring for others. We send them our love.

We continue to hold blended meetings on Sundays but are restricting them to twice monthly rather than weekly.

Before Christmas, we began holding a vigil for peace every Saturday morning between 11 o'clock and midday in the marketplace. We have invited other Devizes residents to join us. Normally around nine people stand in solidarity with those suffering from war and violence around the world for up to an hour.

We showed the Salter Lecture to a small group on 3 October and followed the video with a discussion. The lecture entitled 'How the love we are will guide us through ecological collapse' was originally given by Rupert Read to the Quaker Socialist Society.

During Quaker week, we welcomed a class from Bishop's Cannings School to the Meeting House. We ate a packed lunch together and then had a tour of the building and garden. This was followed by a short talk/discussion about Quakers. We finished with a mini meeting for worship which the children took very seriously. They returned to school by the 49 bus which they were able to catch at the top of the drive.

Churches Together in Devizes has been in the doldrums for some time, made worse by the Covid lockdowns. We are beginning to share activities again and a list of activities is circulated monthly.

We are currently holding several Friends in the light as a result of deaths and illness. We also held a memorial meeting for a Member who died last year and were pleased to welcome several members of the family.

The Meeting House garden continues to be managed for wildlife and people. Our tenant in the flat has seen a badger on the lawn. We continue to hold occasional working parties to maintain the garden and building. Following major work on the sewage pump, we are planning the redecoration of parts of the building. We will also be undertaking work in the flat upstairs after removal of mould that had formed in the stairwell.

Bookings continue to go well and the building is in regular demand by the local community.

One of our Members attended the online Woodbrooke Climate Justice Gathering in November and is also joining with members of other meetings to share ideas about Eco Church. One of the ideas is to help devise a way for Meetings to adapt the questions in the survey to suit Quaker contexts.

Several members continue to be active in Sustainable Devizes.

Since the demise of Traidcraft, it has been harder to promote Fairtrade. Nevertheless, we held a coffee morning before Christmas which may be the last for a while. We are supporting Wiltshire Fairtrade groups as they work to bring a tea farmer to the county to celebrate thirty years of the Fairtrade mark. We thank a member who has left Devizes recently for her work to support Fairtrade in the Meeting.

A wreath of white poppies was laid at the Devizes war memorial after the main Remembrance Day event on 12 November and we stood quietly in remembrance of all who have died or whose lives are affected in war.

Frome

Last year, we reported to Area Meeting that we were still facing many challenges in re-connecting with all our local Friends and Attenders, and in developing more of a recognised presence in our community. Since then, we have worked hard to repair connections that were weakened by the pandemic. We have put in place some of the ideas from our discussion groups, including our "circle of support". For those Friends

who opted to take part, the circle links them with two other Friends and forms a network of contacts and support which connect our meeting together. At a time when we are unable to find enough Friends to serve on the pastoral care group, this dispersed approach means that we can all take part in 'helping one another up with a tender hand'.

Frome Friends continue to meet in person each week at Christchurch Parish Hall. We have encountered some challenges in meeting at the hall through the winter, such as poor acoustics, which we have not been able to solve as yet. We are learning to speak more slowly and clearly however! After another extensive search for suitable alternative accommodation, we have concluded for now that the parish hall is the best venue available. The limitations of the hall have not deterred Friends as between ten and twenty of us regularly gather together for worship. We have started to read from *Advices & Queries* each time we meet. Although we are unable to offer children's meetings at present, as we do not have space, our all-age worship sessions and shared lunches are working well. We have welcomed enquirers and new Attenders during the year.

We no longer hold a mid-week Zoom meeting for worship as we have gradually returned to meeting in person. There are other ways in which we build our community, including:

- Mid-week worship at a Friend's house once a month;
- Winter Sunday evening epilogues on Zoom, which have led to occasional Zoom meetings for the 'Quantum Quakers';
- Our longer-term Experiment with Light group;
- A 'Short read' group which meets fortnightly at a Friend's house;
- Taking part in events in the wider community, such as the Frome Children's Festival, and 'Quiet Time' at the Good Heart Cafe;
- Engaging with Friends from around the country, at Britain Yearly Meeting, and Spiceland Summer Settlement.

We thank all our Friends who contribute to the life of our meeting in these and other ways.

More recently, we have arranged a series of meetings as part of our Sunday worship to consider the questions set by the Area Meeting Enquiry Steering Group. We have also agreed a rota of 'supporting elders' to hold our meetings for worship when our one elder cannot be present. In setting up the rota we have been mindful of the guidance on holding meetings for worship as set out in *Quaker Faith & Practice* 12.12.

We are conscious that many people who attend may not know much about what it means to be a Member of the Religious Society of Friends. We now have a regular short slot after Meeting for Worship, where Friends very briefly describe their journey into membership. Not only does this broaden our understanding; it helps us learn more about each other and is really enlightening and interesting.

In conclusion, our meeting has repaired many of the connections that were frayed or broken by the pandemic, although we have some way to go in encouraging Friends to take up more traditional roles within Quakers. We also need to turn our attention to our presence in the wider community, and hope that the output from the Area Meeting Enquiry Steering Group will help us in our work.

Trowbridge

Life at Trowbridge Local Meeting in 2023 continued much as it did the previous year, though thankfully without the challenges experienced previously during the pandemic. Our numbers at meeting for worship continue to vary between five and ten Friends most weeks—a steady core with others attending less regularly.

We continue to meet on Zoom every week, and in-person at The Hub with a blended meeting every fortnight. Our low numbers—along with the need for two people to open up at the Hub—make returning to that venue every week too much of a challenge at present. However, holding a blended meeting twice a month with Zoom-only meetings on the remaining Sundays means that meeting for worship is available to everyone on a weekly basis. No-one is excluded because they are unable to attend in person.

We have held after-meeting information sessions about ministry and the Quaker business method; contributed to the Area Meeting Enquiry Steering Group, and hosted a session with two Trustees to discuss the way ahead for Area Meeting. One Friend shared his experiences of being a Quaker Life Representative Council representative; two Friends attend the monthly weekday meetings for worship with Frome Local Meeting; and another member of the meeting held an open auction of her artwork to raise funds for a local charity. Friends on an individual basis are involved in climate change action, local community initiatives, and much more.

We have established a 'Care of Trowbridge Meeting' group which includes our pastoral care Friend and three or four other Friends who all work together to provide eldership and pastoral care, in the absence of formally-appointed elders. The group meets every three months to consider the life of the meeting and its members, and appears to be an appropriate way of caring for a very small meeting.

The Hub, where we meet on the Seymour housing estate, is run by Trowbridge Future, a local charity that runs various community projects, and we are pleased to be able to support them with the rent we pay. There have been occasional logistical problems trying to match our needs as a meeting with a space which can become very crowded, and Trowbridge Future have worked very hard to remedy any problems as quickly as possible.

As ever, we welcome visitors, whether in person or on Zoom. We meet in person on the first and third Sundays of the month, and on Zoom the other weeks.