

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting Annual Report 2010

Reference details

1. The subject of this report is the Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), abbreviated as Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting. The Area Meeting may also be known as Hertford and Hitchin Quakers, and was previously known as Hertford and Hitchin Monthly Meeting.

The Area Meeting is part of the organisation of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and the national body is known as Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). The Area Meeting contains a number of Local Meetings, which hold Meetings for Worship and have day-to-day care of Meeting Houses and other property.

The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the area of the Area Meeting and beyond. This may be done by work such as:

- strengthening the life and witness of Quaker meetings both in the area of the Area Meeting and beyond;
 - spreading the message of Quakers and interpreting and developing the thought and practice of the Religious Society;
 - undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad;
 - funding the concerns that Quaker meetings in the area of the Area Meeting or beyond have adopted or agreed to support;
 - providing for the pastoral care of individual Members and Attenders¹ including assistance to those in need and for education;
 - maintaining and developing its Quaker meeting houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world;
 - administering and maintaining the organisation of the Area Meeting and contributing to the support of Britain Yearly Meeting
2. This report and accounts covers the calendar year 2010.
 3. The Area Meeting was registered with the Charity Commission on 29th September 2009 with Registered Charity Number 1131894.
 4. Address that can be used for communication with the Clerk to the Trustees.
David Hindle
6 Mallard Walk
Biggleswade
BEDS
SG18 8DY

¹ “Members” are those who have formally been accepted into membership of the Area Meeting, “Attenders” are those who regularly attend Meeting for Worship but are not Members. The Area Meeting has a general policy of not distinguishing between Members and Attenders.

5. **Trustees In 2010 and 2011:**

Jenny Amery	<i>served in 2010, continues to serve in 2011</i>
Philip Baker	<i>served in 2010, continues to serve in 2011</i>
Christopher Brunton	<i>served in 2010, continues to serve in 2011</i>
Vic Bowell	<i>served in 2010, service terminated 31 December 2010</i>
Ian Chandler	<i>served in 2010, continues to serve in 2011</i>
Bob Harrold	<i>served in 2010, service terminated 31 December 2010</i>
David Hindle	<i>served in 2010, continues to serve in 2011</i>
Rebecca Leek	<i>appointed to serve from 12 June 2010, continues to serve in 2011</i>
Malcolm Whalan	<i>appointed to serve from 9 July 2011</i>

6. **Key officers**

Clerk of Area Meeting in 2010:	Judith Slaymaker
Assistant Clerk of Area Meeting in 2010:	Phil Rowe
Acting Clerk of Area Meeting from September 2011:	Phil Rowe
Assistant Clerk of Area Meeting from September 2011:	Vicky Woodcraft

Names and addresses of other relevant organisations or persons

Bank:

Triodos Bank
Brunel House, 11 The Promenade, Bristol, BS8 3NN

Examiner of Accounts:

John Hawkins

Auditor of 2010 Accounts:

WKH Chartered Accountants
PO Box 501, Letchworth Garden City, Herts, SG6 9BL
The Nexus Building, Broadway, Letchworth Garden City, Herts, SG6 3TA

Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:

Friends Trust Limited
173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Governance

1. The Area Meeting in session adopted a Governing Document on 13 October 2007 (Minute 81/07), amended on 9 November 2008 (Minute 81/08).
2. The activities of the trustees are defined by the Governing Document, and by the Terms of Reference for trustees adopted by the Area Meeting in session on 9 June 2007. Some of the trustees have served as trustees in other bodies, and some have attended training events organised for trustees by Woodbrooke College, Birmingham, a body specialising in Quaker education. The minutes of trustees meetings, and supporting documents, are available on the internet, and the attention of existing and new trustees is drawn to this and other significant information sources on the internet.
3. Meetings for church affairs, in which the Religious Society conducts its business, are meetings for worship based on silence, carrying the expectation that God's guidance can be discerned if members are truly listening together and to each other. The unity that is sought depends on the willingness of all to seek the truth in each other's utterances. There is no voting in any meeting, because the Religious Society believes that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views and inhibit the process of seeking to know the right way forward, the will of God as expressed in the sense of the meeting.

The clerk of the meeting bears the final responsibility for preparing the business, conducting the meeting and drafting the minutes of the meeting. Minutes are drafted by the clerk during the course of the meeting, but the final decision about whether the minute represents the sense of the meeting is the responsibility of the meeting itself, not of the clerk.

This procedure is used for the Area Meeting in session, and for meetings of the trustees.

4. The Area Meeting currently has 7 constituent geographically based Local Meetings which organise Meetings for Worship and form the nuclei of activities for most of the active members of the Area Meeting. These Local Meetings are at:

Guilden Morden	Letchworth
Hertford	Stevenage
Hitchin	Welwyn Garden City.
Hoddesdon	

5. Each of these Local Meetings is authorised to hold bank accounts, and each (except Guilden Morden) has the use of a Meeting House, its place of worship. These are owned by the Area Meeting. Several of the Local Meetings also have warden's accommodation, and Welwyn Garden City also has a small building used as a function room.

Friends Trust Ltd is the custodian trustee of the Area Meeting's properties.

A number of advisory and executive functions are delegated to subsidiary committees, including

- the Finance Committee assists the Area Meeting Treasurer in recommending financial policy and overseeing the financial affairs of the Area and Local Meetings
- the Properties Committee oversees the care of properties, mainly by commissioning a programme of surveys, receiving survey reports, and recommending actions arising from them
- the Camp Committee organises an annual residential camp for Members and Attenders of the Area Meeting and some others; the Camp Committee is authorised to hold a bank account.

The Area Meeting is part of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, of which Britain Yearly Meeting is the body which centrally manages the policy, property, employment and work of the Religious Society.

6. Risk assessment: the Trustees have considered a number of areas of possible risk, as follows:

Care of property	The properties are appropriately insured. There is a rolling programme of property inspections by professional surveyors, which is a structural survey. This process is overseen by the Properties Committee, however, the Trustees are aware that the skills necessary to oversee this are likely to be in short supply at some point in the future and are considering how this need may in future be met.
Health and Safety	The Local Meetings are responsible for assessing the safety aspects of the use of the buildings in their care or which they use. The Trustees are considering an overall Health and Safety Policy for the guidance of the Local Meetings.
Financial probity	The Area Meeting and its constituent bodies have no activities which constitute a major financial risk. There is a financial reporting system which includes independent examination of the Area Meeting's and its constituent bodies' annual accounts. The accounts for 2010 have been subjected to a professional external audit in line with the Charity Commission's requirements.

Investments	The Area Meeting's funds are mostly in bank accounts which are thought to be largely independent of the recent banking crisis. The placement of the funds is reviewed periodically.
Employment	The Trustees are currently examining the employment practices in the Area Meeting's Local Meetings with regard to legal and fairness requirements. Model contracts for paid and for volunteer employees are close to completion, and grievance and disciplinary procedures have been agreed.
Child Safety	A Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy for the Area Meeting was agreed in 2009 and a network of responsible persons for the Area Meeting and each Local Meeting has been implemented. A Safeguarding Handbook for the context of Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting was produced in 2010.

Objectives and activities

1. The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends.

The main activity of the constituent Local Meetings is the right holding of public meetings for worship, and regular meetings for church affairs.

The Area Meeting itself holds meetings for church affairs and supports its constituent Local Meetings, including providing grants and practical support to develop the life of meetings, and of individual Quakers and attenders.

Other activities include:

- sustaining faith relations, nurturing relations with other Quaker bodies, with other denominations and with other faiths
- promoting the Quaker way of life, including promoting our beliefs and practices.
- witness through action, which involves carrying out active programmes of work to address social problems including conflict resolution and reconciliation. This work is often in partnership with or by supporting other organisations.

2. The Area Meeting and its constituent Local Meetings decide from time to time to use their funds to support Britain Yearly Meeting and other Quaker bodies, and also to support individuals and non-Quaker organisations whose objects and actions are in accordance with core Quaker values, including peace, truth, justice, and equality.

Achievements and performance

1. At the end of 2010, the Area Meeting had 201 Members (2 less than in 2009), and 91 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 6 members by death and 1 by transfer, and gained 4 members by application and 1 by transfer.
2. The constituent Local Meetings held public Meetings for Worship as follows:

<i>Meeting (location)</i>	<i>Frequency of public Meetings for Worship</i>	<i>No. of public Meetings for Worship in 2010</i>	<i>Estimated Average Attendance</i>
Guilden Morden	Twice monthly	24	5
Hertford	Weekly	52	16
Hitchin	Weekly	52	18
Hoddesdon	Weekly	52	4
Letchworth	Weekly	52	18
Stevenage	Weekly	52	8
Welwyn	8am each Sunday	40	9
Garden City	except 1 st in month 10:30 am each Sunday 11.00 – 11.45 one Wed per month at the MH or a Friend's house	52	30

3. Each of the Local Meetings has a formal or informal programme of developing the spiritual and social life of its members. These include at individual Local Meetings:
 - Christmas Celebrations
 - New Year's Day walk
 - Regular Sunday evening meetings and concerts
 - Study groups e.g. on Climate Change
 - talks and meetings with Quaker and other activists
 - financial support in cases of need for Friends attending courses and events at Quaker centres
4. The Area Meeting Annual Camp includes significant spiritual content with Meetings for Worship on each day and some discussions, and the usual community activities – walks, food preparation and eating, artwork, children's activities, quiz evening and music making. Charges for attending camp are fixed at a level which reflects the costs, allowing for a fund to deal with unexpected expenses. Charges are on an age-related scale which encourages families with children to attend. Camp in 2010 was at Merevale Farm, Great Malvern, from 7 to 14 August 2010 and 53 campers attended.
5. Most Local Meetings have regular contacts with Church and Community groups within their immediate areas. Examples of these are:
 - local Churches Together
 - Trustees of local Educational Charity
 - Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
 - meetings with representatives and groups from non-christian religions
 - representation on UNA, Friends of the Earth, Amnesty International and Transition Town groups

6. All the Local Meetings except Guilden Morden have Meeting Houses and other facilities which are available for use by the wider community. The availability of these premises is regarded as a form of service to the community, particularly when they are used by groups answering a social need or providing a cultural service. In some cases additional support eg staffing or facilities is provided to some of these groups.

Examples of these are:

- pre-school groups
- people with learning difficulties
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Credit Union
- Muslims Friday prayer group
- Best Start Club for babies' sign language
- various music groups

The hiring of these premises is also a significant source of revenue for the meetings.

7. Fundraising for both Quaker and Non-Quaker charitable bodies both on a regular basis and as special events or series of events.

Financial review

1. Reserves Policy

The reserves policy for Area Meeting central funds is based on holding money in various nominal funds at Area Meeting level. The required level of Area Meeting funds is agreed annually by Finance Committee. The required level for 2010 (taken from the budget for 2010) is as follows:

Funds held for the following purposes	Required level
Building Fund	18,000
General Purposes	25,000
Peace Witness	1,000
Quaker Work	10,000
AM Camp	2,125
Total Area Meeting central funds	56,125

For the operation of Local Meetings it is expected that each of these should hold enough capital reserves to operate for 1 year. The required level of funds (taken as an average of 2009 and 2010's accounts) is as follows (note that any individual Meeting's required level may contain exceptional items, especially for building work but the overall total will be approximately correct across all Meetings):

Local Meeting	Required level
Guilden Morden	1,000
Hertford	20,000
Hitchin	11,000
Hoddesdon	7,000
Letchworth	12,000
Stevenage	16,000
Welwyn Garden City	41,000
Total for all Local Meetings	108,000

2. Deficits

None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2010.

3. Principal Funding Sources

Normally, funds are mostly contributed by members (£53,000) and from letting of our Meeting Houses (£70,000) with a small amount received in donations from outside bodies (£3,000). Interest and dividends also contribute a relatively small amount (£1,000). Unusually, in 2010 a substantial amount was received in bequests (£660,000).

4. Expenditure

Our main expenditure of funds (£75,000) is on governance of our Local and Area Meetings, including building costs. These are expended in support of our role as a religious organisation at a local level. A lesser amount (£47,000) is expended on grants, most of which are made to Britain Yearly Meeting in furtherance of the centrally organised work of the Religious Society of Friends.

Due to an unusually large bequest received in late 2010, it is likely that the amount paid in grants will be somewhat greater than usual in the next few years.

5. Investment Policy

Our funds are all invested with ethical organisations. In general it is expected that our investments will keep pace with inflation, thus retaining their value in monetary terms. LM funds are mainly held in interest bearing bank accounts, but some of our central funds (£34,000) are deliberately held as investments of a social nature, which do not necessarily yield as highly in financial terms.

Key plans for the future

1. The Trustees are continuing their review of the workings of the Area Meeting, and hope to establish more formal agreements ('Memoranda of Understanding') as to the reciprocal responsibilities of the Area Meeting and its constituent bodies.
2. The Area Meeting is planning to hold 'Quaker Quest' events; while these events are normally regarded as 'outreach', informing the wider public about Quakerism, experience in other area meetings suggests that they also contribute to the spiritual development of the meetings involved in running them.
3. While the financial affairs of the Area Meeting are in general in good order, the Building Fund was considerably depleted by works carried out mostly in 2006 and 2007 and has not been fully restored to its previous level. The planned recovery of this Fund continues.
4. In 2010, an unusually large amount was received by Welwyn Garden City Meeting as a bequest. The Local Meeting has consulted widely within its membership, and with Britain Yearly Meeting, on appropriate ways to use this money in line with the objects of the Area Meeting.