

# Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting Annual Report 2014

## Reference details

1. This is the trustees' report for the Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), abbreviated as Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting. The Area Meeting is also 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 Attenders<sup>1</sup> 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 2014.
3. The Area Meeting was registered with the Charity Commission on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2009 with Registered Charity Number 1131894.
4. Address that can be used for communication with the Clerk to the Trustees.

Ian Chandler  
Kirby Manor  
73 High Street  
ASHWELL  
Hertfordshire  
SG7 5NP

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<sup>1</sup> "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 2014:

Ian Chandler	served in 2014, continues to serve in 2015
Katie Frost	served in 2014, continues to serve in 2015
Kim Noy Man Jackson	served in 2014, continues to serve in 2015
Roger Jarvis	served in 2014, continues to serve in 2015
Rebecca Leek	served in 2014, service ended 31 <sup>st</sup> May 2014
Frances Prestidge	served in 2014, continues to serve in 2015

6. Key officers

Area Meeting Correspondence Clerk David Hindle

*Currently no appointment of Clerk or Assistant Clerk of Area Meeting has been made after 2011, the functions of these roles is rotated between the Local Meetings hosting the Area Meeting sessions, and a Correspondence Clerk was appointed to receive communications.*

Treasurer Gerald Drewett

Names and addresses of other relevant organisations or persons

***Bank:***

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

***Examiner of Accounts:***

Adam Armsby

***Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:***

Friends Trusts 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. The minutes of trustees meetings, and supporting documents, are available (currently passworded) 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 as this would inhibit the process of seeking to know 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 during 2014 had 6 constituent geographically based Local Meetings which organise Meetings for Worship. These Local Meetings are at:

Guilden Morden	Letchworth
Hertford	Stevenage
Hitchin	Welwyn Garden City.

The Local Meeting at Hoddesdon was laid down at the start of 2012. The Area Meeting continues to oversee the building and plans are progressing. See *Plans for the Future* below.

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 wardens' accommodation, and Welwyn Garden City also has a small building used as a function room.

Friends Trusts 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.
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 incorporating oversight of this into a memorandum of understanding.
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.
Investments	The Area Meeting's funds are mostly in bank accounts. The placement of the funds is reviewed periodically.
Employment	The Trustees have examined the employment practices in the Local Meetings with regard to legal requirements. New contracts have been employed by Welwyn Garden City Meeting. Letchworth Meeting is currently exploring new contracts. Model contracts for paid workers and agreements for volunteers are close to completion.
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 how 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 2014, the Area Meeting had 162 Members, and 118 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 3 members by death, 3 by transfer, and 3 terminated by the Area Meeting. It gained 3 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 2014</i>	<i>Estimated Average Attendance</i>
Guilden Morden	Twice monthly	24	6
Hertford	Weekly Sunday	52	18
	Weekly Wednesday 12:30	48	8
Hitchin	Weekly. An extra Meeting for Worship on 25 <sup>th</sup> December	53	18
Letchworth	Weekly	52	15
Stevenage	Weekly	52	8
Welwyn	Weekly Sunday 10.30	52	20
Garden City	Weekly Sunday 8 (not 1 <sup>st</sup> Sun)	40	12
	Monthly on Wednesday	12	7

3. During 2014 the Area Meeting has continued to pursue policies of good governance and furtherance of our charitable objectives in compliance with its governing document. Fiscal oversight has been achieved by the receipt and acceptance of both the business accounts 2013 for the Area Meeting, and also the receipt of the consolidated accounts 2013 for the local meetings over which it has oversight. The budget for 2014 was also accepted. Pastoral and spiritual responsibility has been overseen by the appointment of Overseers and Elders. Development opportunities have been provided for our younger members by enabling representatives to go to Britain Yearly Meeting, Quaker United Nations Summer School in Geneva and Meeting for Sufferings Young People Participation Day, while a wide range of courses have been attended by our more mature members in subjects designed to further our charitable and religious objectives.
4. A total of 6 Area Meetings were held with a total attendance of 160 Friends. Early in 2014 we began our plans for the commemoration of World War 1 and we were also pleased to support Bishops Stortford Museum in their plans to mark this event by the loan of Arthur Waterman letters in our custody. A charity supported by one of our local meetings was also supported financially by Area Meeting. Our membership procedure has been reviewed and amended. This year also saw us appoint a Friend to oversee burials and scattering of ashes on our properties. We accepted the terms of reference for our reconstituted Property Committee. Our trustees have appointed a representative to each Area Meeting, and presented their Annual Report. Reports have also been received regularly from our representative on Meeting for Sufferings, our standing executive body between Britain Yearly Meetings. Our cycle of triennial reports from our local meetings has continued.
5. An interest group on sustainability was formed within our Area Meeting, as well as reports received from local meetings on putting Quaker principles into action. The Area Meeting quotas and building fund were agreed, and the repair work at Hitchin was underwritten. An archive and Records discussion meeting was held, and recommendations made regarding Local Meetings contributions to Britain Yearly Meeting. Area Meeting dates for 2015 were agreed. The Tabular Statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our local meetings) was received; the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership.

6. During this year some Friends have expressed concern regarding attendance at Area Meeting.
7. Each of the Local Meetings had a formal or informal programme of developing the spiritual and social life of its members. These included, at individual Local Meetings:
  - Quiz night (in aid of charity)
  - Quaker discussion group on 'Quaker Questions'
  - Garden party for Meeting House work
  - Christmas celebration party
  - Shared lunches including discussion on topics such as the 'Way Ahead' document
  - Afterword
  - 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday party
  - Reading group
  - Discussion group for attenders
  - Various social evenings including fundraising events
  - Experiment with Light Group
  - Evening Summer walks

Local Meetings organised their own commemoration of the First World War including shared lunches and an exhibition at Welwyn Garden City Local Meeting on the part relatives of Friends in Meetings played. This exhibition was also displayed in Stevenage Local Meeting. A play on Conscientious Objection was produced, written by Jan Arriens. At Hitchin Local Meeting Torsten Anders gave a talk that was well received.

Local Meetings for Worship included the regular reading of advices and queries. Our Elders and Overseers met regularly together to keep in mind the spiritual and pastoral needs of all Friends and attenders. At Hitchin Local Meeting, Chris Kell in her role as Safeguarding Officer, wrote an article for Quakerview highlighting the importance of Safeguarding for us all and what to do if we have a concern.

Local Meetings encouraged the attendance of Friends at a number of learning opportunities. These included at Hitchin Local Meeting the 'Food for thought' discussion meetings that have been well attended on topics including 'What is God?', 'Peace' and 'Forgiveness'. Friends have also attended workshops on 'Creating Dementia Friendly Communities' and a Kindler workshop at Friends House. Hertford Quaker Meeting started a new 'Becoming Friends' group that continue to meet monthly. A local meeting arranged a discussion session held for Attenders. Letchworth Meeting funded the attendance of a young Friend at the QUNO Summer School and also produced a booklet about the life and work of Edward Grubb.

Friends attended meetings on behalf of our Area Meeting including Britain Yearly Meeting in Bath.

8. Most Local Meetings had regular contact with Church and Community groups within their immediate areas and actively worked with others in our community. Examples of these are:
  - Assisting archeologists at Baldock Meeting House
  - Hitchin Food Bank
  - Hitchin survival – an information leaflet for those in need locally
  - Cellar Club – providing food and support for people with mental health and other problems in Welwyn Garden City

9. All the Local Meetings except Guilden Morden have Meeting Houses and other facilities which are available for use by the wider community. Welwyn Garden City has *The Backhouse Room* which is an additional, separate meeting room. 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 in 2014 were:

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Muslims Friday prayer group
- Spiritualists group
- Music and dancing groups and clubs
- Yoga group
- Educational groups
- A Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties at Stevenage Meeting House

Our Meeting Houses and surrounding areas have seen significant improvements during 2014. Stevenage Quaker Meeting saw the completion of the dedicated room and kitchenette for the Stevenage LD Day Centre, a wonderful additional asset to the building that enables the group to meet every weekday and is also in use at evenings and weekends. Letchworth Meeting made improvements by planting new trees outside the Meeting House. At Welwyn Garden City Quaker Meeting, a significant refurbishment took place during which time Friends met in the Backhouse room close to the Meeting House. New signage to the Meeting House was provided by Hertfordshire Highways Department.

The hiring of these premises remains a significant source of revenue for the meetings, however, charges may also be reduced or held to a level which encourages groups in difficulty. The development of facilities within and outside Meeting Houses are also seen to be closely related to outreach.

10. Quaker witness includes supporting Quaker organisations and also non-Quaker organisations which pursue aims in line with Quaker values, particular (but not exclusively) historical Quaker concerns such as peace, justice, refugees, treatment of criminals, and emergency relief, all areas where “that of God in all people” is often not recognised.

As part of our support, Local Meetings have raised funds for Quaker and non-Quaker charitable bodies both on a regular basis and as special events or series of events. These include:

- Peace Direct
- Diapalante (a local charity working in West Africa)
- Gomer and Dorothy Jones Memorial Fund – discernment on causes by Letchworth LM
- Amnesty International
- Burundi Appeal (BYM)

Activities also help Friends support of organisations including Letchworth and Hertford Meeting Friends who knitted scarves for the ‘Wool against Weapons’ appeal and Hitchin Friends who attended the mass Anti Trident protest at Aldermaston. Hitchin Friends helped support a stall at Churches Together in Hitchin ‘Party in the Square’, with origami doves and paper cranes. Hertford Quaker Meeting hosted Christian Aid lunches every Wednesday during lent.

11. Local Meetings held or prepared to hold Children’s Meetings during 2014. Hitchin Quaker Meeting held a training session with Chris Nickolay from Quaker Life to support Friends involved in Children’s



Meeting where there is a small regular group of four under eights. At Hertford Quaker Meeting, the Children decided they would like to sponsor a child through Plan UK and been raising money by making cakes.

12. Both Local Meetings and Area Meeting considered their outreach activities. Many Friends joined in the National Day of Fasting and Hertford Quaker Meeting continued to open the Meeting House every second Saturday morning during the Summer for visitors and had 56 visitors during Heritage Open Day in September. Friends were also involved in 'Prayers for people in Iraq'.
13. Friends have been active in ensuring the vibrancy and health of our religious society. During 2014 some Friends have continued to be exercised by membership being well over the age of 60 and difficulties in finding Friends to take on essential tasks of service to the Meeting. Some local meetings looked at creative ways of addressing the problems this brings. Friends with wardens greatly appreciated the work of wardens during 2014 who look after our Meeting houses, organising hirings and contributing in so many ways to the life of our Meetings, including administration, outreach and our Quaker witness with energy and enthusiasm.

## Financial Review

### Reserves Policy

The reserves policy for Area Meeting central funds is based on holding money in various nominal funds at Area Meeting level. The level of Area Meeting funds is agreed annually by the Treasurer in consultation with Finance Committee. The level for 2014 is as follows:

<u>Funds held for the following purposes</u>	<u>Amount £</u>
Building Fund	60,000
General Purposes	32,000
Outreach	2,000
Peace Witness	1,000
Quaker Work	5,000
Camp Committee	6,000
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>106,000</u></b>

For the operation of Local Meetings it is expected that each of these should hold enough reserves to operate for 1 year and meet future building requirements. The level of funds for 2014 is:

<u>Local Meeting</u>	<u>Amount £</u>
Guilden Morden	1,000
Hertford	25,000
Hitchin	20,000
Letchworth	18,000
Stevenage	10,000
Welwyn Garden City	40,000
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>114,000</u></b>

Additionally Welwyn Garden City meeting has £200,000 remaining of £400,000 allocated from a legacy for building alterations.

### Income and Expenditure

1. None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2014.
2. **Income:** Funds from members were £44,000 and from letting our Meeting Houses £76,000. Legacies plus grants or donations from outside bodies were £16,000. Interest received on cash balances was £3,200.
3. **Expenditure:** Our largest expenditure is normally on maintaining buildings (£334,000) in support of our role as a religious organisation at a local level. In 2014 a significant amount (£33,000) was expended on grants, of which about 66% went to Britain Yearly Meeting in furtherance of the centrally organised work of the Religious Society of Friends.

The amount spent on administration within the Area Meeting in 2014 was £8,965.

4. **Investment Policy:** Our funds are generally held by or invested in organisations with good ethical policies such as Triodos Bank, Ecology Building Society, Co-operative Bank and Shared Interest.

## **Key plans for the future**

1. The Trustees are continuing to review their work and relationships, and hope to establish more formal agreements ('Memoranda of Understanding') as to the reciprocal responsibilities of the Area Meeting and its constituent bodies.
2. Following the laying down of Hoddesdon Meeting at the beginning of 2012, the Hoddesdon group continues to meet and report to Area Meeting.
3. In the continuing environment of economic austerity, Local Meeting plan to support Food Banks and other initiatives including 'Books for the Community' where passers by are invited to take any books that may be of interest to them.
4. Meeting houses plan to host celebrations including weddings.
5. Local Meeting look to work on best ways to utilise what spiritual, financial and people resources are available to nurture the life of the Meeting.
6. Hertford local meeting is planning to improve the Quaker Room in order to make it look more attractive to hirers and Hitchin Quaker Meeting are enthusiastic about a proposed Peace Garden as a Quaker witness to Peace.
7. Hertford local meeting has begun an exploration of eldership and oversight