

# Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting Annual Report 2015

## 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 2015.
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 2015:

Ian Chandler	served in 2015, continues to serve in 2016
Katie Frost	served in 2015, continues to serve in 2016
Kim Noy Man Jackson	served in 2015, continues to serve in 2016
Roger Jarvis	served in 2015, continues to serve in 2016
Frances Prestidge	served in 2015, continues to serve in 2016

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 2015 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 organizes an annual residential camp on behalf of Grand Union Quaker Camps, a registered charity, for Members and Attenders of the Area Meeting and some others; the Camp Committee is authorized 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.
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 2015, the Area Meeting had 156 Members, and 124 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 2 members by death, and 4 by application for resignation which were accepted by Area Meeting.
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 2015</i>	<i>Estimated Average Attendance</i>
Guilden Morden	Twice monthly 10.30am	24	5
Hertford	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	18
Hitchin	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	15
Letchworth	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	15
Stevenage	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	6
Welwyn Garden City	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	20
	Weekly Sunday 8am (not 1 <sup>st</sup> Sun)	40	n/a

3. During 2015 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 at all levels by the receipt and acceptance of both the examined business accounts 2014 for the Area Meeting, and also the receipt of the examined amalgamated accounts 2014 for the local meetings over which it has oversight. The budget for 2016 was also accepted. The financial timetable for 2016 was received, and Area Meeting quotas for 2015 agreed: Area Meeting also considered a minute from one of our local meetings concerning quotas. 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 a representative to go to Junior Yearly Meeting, while a wide range of courses have been attended by our more mature members in subjects designed to further our charitable and religious objectives. Friends of all ages can go to our summer camp which promotes the Quaker ethos and testimonies in a fun environment.
4. A total of 6 Area Meetings were held with a total attendance of 129 Friends. One Special Area Meeting was held to consider “What can we do with what we’ve got?”. As part of our continuing plans to commemorate World War 1, we were pleased to be able to progress The Tribunal Theatre Project ( a drama about conscientious objection). A report on the use of the loan of the Arthur Waterman letters by Bishop Stortford museum, including an exhibition, and in collaboration with other local bodies a dramatic presentation by The Twisted Events Theatre Company presenting an opportunity to engage with pacifism issues was received. The Area Meeting was pleased to receive a presentation on Care of our Meetings, which is actively being considered, and we were advised of a meeting to consider Area Meeting’s relationship with Meeting for Sufferings, our standing executive body between Britain Yearly Meetings. Reports have also been received regularly from Meeting for Sufferings, and the various committees accountable to Area Meeting. A new timetable for triennial reports from our local meetings has been agreed and embarked on. Regular reports from the Hoddesdon Action Group have been received by Area Meeting, as has correspondence received including on The Goddard Inquiry (child sex abuse). A Meeting for Worship for the solemnization of our first same sex marriage was celebrated this year.
5. A Privacy and Access policy (internet) was considered, and Area Meeting website improvements were also reported. A Concern was considered on what action might be taken in relation to Syrian vulnerable persons relocation. Area Meeting dates for 2016 were agreed, and the tabular statement ( an indicator of the numerical strength of our local meetings) for 2014 was received; the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership.

6. During 2015 five trustees served. We see one of our functions as providing advice and counsel to Area Meeting in session. We occasionally flag up matters of concern to Area Meeting by minute. Trustees appoint representatives to all Area Meetings in session. New trustees are appointed by the Area Meeting following nomination from the Area Meeting Nominations Committee. The trustees presented to Area Meeting their annual report for 2014 to the Charity Commission, as well as their own internal report to Area Meeting. During 2015 all trustee meetings were quorate. Support is made available by Area Meeting to all trustees, and one trustee from our Area Meeting is also a trustee on Grand Union Quaker Camps.
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:
  - Gardening Work Parties
  - Fundraising Events
  - New Year's Party and Christmas Lunch
  - Shared lunches including discussion on topics such as the 'Spoken Ministry'
  - Afterword
  - Friendly Bible Study
  - Get to know your Friends
  - Meeting outing
  - Reading group
  - Quiet Day.
  - Experiment with Light Group
  - Becoming Friends

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. Welwyn Garden City Meeting Elders and Overseers considered how they could better support all their members both spiritually and practically. and started a monthly Meeting for Worship in a Hatfield Care Home. In their business meetings Local Meetings considered items prior to Area Meetings. A performance of "Tribunal", a play about the 1916 conscientious objectors was also performed.

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 'Struggling with Pacifism', 'Ethical Dilemmas', and a series of 'Spiritual Inspiration' reflections have recently been introduced. Meetings have also been involved with 'Becoming Friends' courses, and the Woodbrooke on line resource 'Being Friends Together'. Hertford Local Meeting held four shared discussion lunches this year, topics included "Spoken Ministry", "Sustainability" and "Gifts". Hitchin Local Meeting hosted a thoughtful workshop on the refugee crisis, "The Challenge Ahead, The EU, Peace, and Migration," led by Jessica Metheringham, Quaker Parliamentary Liaison Officer.

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

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:
  - Hitchin Food Bank
  - Hitchin survival – an information leaflet for those in need locally
  - Hitchin Counselling Service
  - 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 2015 were:

- Music and dancing groups and clubs
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Hitchin Historical Society Committee Meeting
- Circles of Support
- Yoga group
- Educational groups
- A Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties at Stevenage Meeting House

Plans have continued this year to improve the facilities our meeting houses can offer to users. Services such as Wi-Fi have been considered as a future investment. Plans are also being made to improve the Quaker Room at Hertford Local Meeting, and Hitchin Friends are finalizing plans for a Peace Garden which will include input from other faiths and community groups. Hitchin Friends have also been greatly exercised over the question of rough sleepers in their grounds; how do you deal with them firmly, yet with compassion? The answer was to enforce a zero-tolerance policy, recognizing our responsibilities to our users, while having an arrangement with North Herts Sanctuary (local homeless hostel), who will be able to arrange a range of options and support to any rough sleepers in the future. Welwyn Garden City Local Meeting completed the major refurbishment of their Meeting House (apart from minor adjustments), and the building reopened with a public ribbon-cutting. Stevenage Local Meeting House was improved, and remains a popular and well used venue for local community, cultural, and religious groups.

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:

- Donation to Various Charities and Appeals
- Donation to Area Meeting
- North Herts Sanctuary

Activities include a Friend from Hitchin Meeting who supported Hitchin Forum by wardening several of their footpaths. Several Meetings have supported Christian Aid this year. Hitchin Friends supported a Christian Aid quiz and supplied collectors for Christian Aid week. Hertford Friends held Christian Aid lunches weekly during Lent. Several Meetings have been involved with activities to support local Churches Together groups.



11. Local Meetings held or prepared to hold Children's Meetings during 2015. Several Meetings held all age Meetings for Worship during 2015. Most Meetings have monthly Children's Meetings. At Hitchin Meeting the children have performed short dramas at the close of Meeting for Worship about the First World War Christmas Truce, and another about Margaret Fell.
12. Both Local Meetings and Area Meeting considered their outreach activities. Hitchin Friends were delighted to welcome a mixed age group of students from Hitchin Boys' School for a successful visit. Several Meetings opened their Meeting Houses for Heritage Open Days in September, and Beds And Herts Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Bike 'n Hike., both these events resulted in people exploring the Meeting Houses who might otherwise never do so. Welwyn Garden City Local Meeting laid out a peace labyrinth on the grassy area in front of the Meeting House, to mark the centenary of the First World War.. This captured the imagination of passers by, especially children, and attracted interest. Stevenage Friends ran an outreach stall at a local Town Centre Gardens community event. A member of Stevenage Local Meeting contributed to the Mayor's Civic Service, along with other faith and community leaders.
13. Friends have been active in ensuring the vibrancy and health of our religious society. During 2015 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 2015 who look after our Meeting Houses, organizing 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 2015 is as follows:

<u>Funds held for the following purposes</u>	<u>Amount £</u>
Building Fund	60,000
General Purposes	20,000
Outreach	2,000
Peace Witness	1,000
Quaker Work	5,000
Camp Committee	6,000
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>94,000</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 non-exceptional building requirements. The level of funds for 2015 is:

<u>Local Meeting</u>	<u>Amount £</u>
Guilden Morden	1,000
Hertford	18,000
Hitchin	18,000
Letchworth	18,000
Stevenage	10,000
Welwyn Garden City	40,000
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>105,000</u></b>

Welwyn Garden City meeting has now spent the remaining £200,000 allocated from a legacy for building alterations.

### Income and Expenditure

1. None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2015.
2. **Income:** Funds from members were £41,000 and from letting our Meeting Houses £75,000. Legacies plus grants or donations from outside bodies were £8,000. Interest received on cash balances was £900.
3. **Expenditure:** Our largest expenditure is normally on maintaining buildings (£288,000) in support of our role as a religious organisation at a local level. In 2015 a significant amount (£25,000) was expended on grants, of which about 60% 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 2015 was £7,793.

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 continue to actively support Food Banks and other initiatives.
4. Involvement with local initiatives to participate in Herts Welcomes Syrian Refugee programme.
5. Local Meetings look to work on best ways to utilise what spiritual, financial, and people resources are available to nurture the life of the Meeting.
6. Laying a white poppy wreath on Remembrance Sunday in the 100<sup>th</sup> year since the introduction of the law that exempts people from military service on grounds of conscience.
7. Continue to have an outreach presence at local events, our capacity allowing, particularly the Stevenage Town Centre Gardens community day.
8. Improvements to the Quaker Room at Hertford Local Meeting, and the laying out of a Peace Garden at Hitchin Local Meeting.
9. Greater greening of our Meeting Houses.