

**The Religious Society of Friends  
(Quakers) in Britain  
Northumbria Area Meeting (Charity no. 1134532)**

**Report of the Trustees**

**for the Year Ended**

**31<sup>st</sup> December 2020**

## **Trustees who served during 2020**

Jeff Dean co-clerk (Durham LM)

Gillian Moore co-clerk (Sunderland LM)

Howard Maskill (Hexham LM)

Nigel Barnes (Allendale LM)

Cait Foley (Monkseaton LM)

Marcia Lemon (Newcastle LM)

Simon Court (Newcastle LM from December 2020)

Graham Howard Taylor (Stocksfield)

David Westgate, AM Assistant Clerk (ex officio)\_

Northumbria Area Meeting Trustees are pleased to present their report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 December 2020. The report aims to summarise the activities, work and key events for Northumbria Area Meeting and its Local Meetings. The aim is also to explain the role of the Trustees and their relationship with the Area Meeting, which is a worshipping community seeking to live our lives , as individuals and as a community, in accordance with Quaker values and testimonies which are deeply held and long standing.

The Trustees have adopted the provisions of 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 (FRS102) effective 1 January 2015.

The Trustees confirm that they have complied with the duty in section 4 of the Charities Act to have regard to guidance published by the Charity Commission with respect to Public Benefit. In the opinion of the Trustees, the continuing

activities of the Northumbria area Quaker Meeting do constitute public benefit activities. Such activities are reported in section C.

## **Structure, Management and Governance**

Northumbria Area Quaker Meeting is a charity established for the advancement of religion and other charitable purposes such as derive from or bear witness to the principles and practices of the Religious Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers.

The Religious Society of Friends in Britain is a Christian denomination founded in the seventeenth century.

The final constitutional authority of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain is Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). Its membership consists of all those who belong to the Area Meetings in Britain of which there are approximately 70, and of which Northumbria Area Meeting (NAM) is one. Britain Yearly Meeting has a gathering each summer. This year, this was held 'virtually' on Zoom. AMs (Area Meetings) send a number of representatives and as many others who wish also attend. During the year, AMs send representatives to the Meeting for Sufferings to meet together a few times with BYM. This is a standing representative body entrusted with the general care of matters affecting Quakers in Britain. Each representative reports to back their AM. The agenda for the annual BYM gathering is formed from these deliberations.

BYM also, from their offices, Friends House in London, give advice and support to all Quakers in Britain. They prepare policy and procedure information in booklet form, and useful information leaflets for our members, attenders and new enquirers. All AMs give money to enable BYM to give their invaluable support.

The principal activity of the Area Meeting (AM) is the holding of weekly, publicly advertised Meetings for Worship within its Local Meetings (LMs). These Meetings for Worship are open to all who wish to attend. There are 8 Local Meetings in Northumbria Area Meeting (NAM): Allendale, Alnwick,

Durham, Hexham, Monkseaton, Newcastle, Sunderland and Stocksfield. Northumberland Area Meeting has 240 formally accepted members, and in addition 109 regular attenders. All these members and attenders attend Meetings for Worship in one or other of the Local Meetings.

Quaker faith is rooted in the belief of living our lives according to our spiritual experience. This is the basis of Quaker testimonies to peace, truth, simplicity, equality and sustainability, which guide Quaker behaviour, work and witness. This report will describe some of this work and witness undertaken by the 8 Local Meetings.

The charity's Governing Document defines the way it is organised and managed. The Governing document was approved by Northumbria Area Meeting in July 2008 under minute 7/7/08. The Charity was registered with the Charities Commission on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2010 as Charity Number 1134512: the current scheme was agreed on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

In the Quaker tradition, decisions about policies, charitable activities and priorities are taken by the members of the Area Meeting at regular business meetings, and not by the charity's Trustees, who provide advice and guidance and take responsibility for the statutory and legal duties of the charity. Area Business Meetings are open to all members of the Area Meeting, and Local Meetings appoint representatives to ensure effective representation. All Local Meetings receive minutes of the business meetings and can comment freely on the work of NAM. Area Meeting meets for business affairs 4 times a year, and in addition there are 4 working group meetings per year to deal with more routine decisions. Minutes of the Area Meeting record acceptance and transfers of membership and also of births and deaths.

The 'Quaker Business Method' is a key part of the way that we conduct our affairs. This applies to all Quaker Meetings for Business and has been followed almost unchanged for over 350 years. The Meetings for Business begin with a short silence. The Clerk is responsible for the agenda and the conduct of the Meeting, and is the servant of the Meeting, taking no part in the discussion, but listening to contributions and discerning the sense of the Meeting. Quakers do not vote, they discern what is the right decision for the Meeting.

The decision is then recorded by means of a Minute, and Minutes are written by the clerk and agreed by the Meeting in session after each item.

Local Meetings (LMs) are branches of the charity, under the care of NAM Trustees. They have their own committees which manage the running of their Meeting. They have their own treasurers and bank accounts. The relationship between the LMs and Trustees is set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This was written in consultation and agreement with LMs and which each LM is required to sign. The MoU gives delegated authority to the LMs, subject to agreed policies and procedures. Each LM within the Area Meeting has a 'Link Trustee' to whom they can turn for advice and guidance.

Trustees are appointed by Area Meeting on the basis of nominations proposed by NAM Nominations Committee. This process is a key part of the Quaker Business Method: the NAM Nominations Committee is responsible for recommending 'names' to Area Meeting for AM roles. These 'names' are then approved and appointed, or declined, at the Area Business Meeting. There is a parallel nominations and appointment system for each of the Local Meetings, for all other roles. Quakers have no paid ministers or officers, and all functions are undertaken by unpaid members of the Meeting. Training is offered for all significant roles by the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, either as residential courses, locally organised day courses with 'Woodbrooke on the Road', or on line. Cost for this training is met by Area Meeting.

As for other roles, in line with Quaker practice, Trustees are appointed for a three year term, which can be extended for a second term by mutual agreement between the Trustee and Area Meeting. Only in exceptional circumstances do Trustees serve a third term. New Trustees receive a detailed induction 'briefing' and are given opportunities for training, as are other roles.

### **The role of Trustees**

1. Trustees have developed, and maintain policies on finance, reserves, ethical investment, insurance, safeguarding, employment, data protection, health and safety. They have developed a complaints policy.

They are responsible for ensuring that these policies are upheld by members and attenders of the Area Meeting.

2. Northumbria Area Meeting owns and is responsible for 7 properties: meeting houses for Allendale, Monkseaton, Newcastle, Stocksfield and Sunderland, a cottage at Allendale which is rented out, and a flat in Newcastle left with a sitting tenant on legacy. All property is held by Friends Trusts Ltd, based in London, as custodian trustee, on behalf of the Area Meeting and its constituent LMs.
3. Our investments are managed by Rathbone and Greenbank who aim to maintain the long-term purchasing power of the capital on a 'Cautious to Risk' basis. Investments are chosen such that none shall be in companies which invest in prostitution, munitions and related products, or fossil fuel and mineral extractions, or have more than peripheral engagement in alcohol, tobacco, pornography or gambling. In addition they are proactive in seeking out investment opportunities for projects which accord with our Quaker values, which they then suggest to us. This enables us to be more actively involved in how our investments are used. A recent example is a development initiative for building homes for long-term or permanent housing for the homeless.
4. We have 2 employees, 1 full time and 1 part-time, looking after the buildings for Newcastle and Sunderland, with increasing involvement with Monkseaton, Stocksfield and Allendale Meeting Houses. Trustees are responsible for ensuring that proper employment contracts are in place. NAM is a member of the Living Wage Foundation, which means that all our employees and all regular contractors such as cleaners, are paid the LWF living wage.
5. Health and safety.
6. Safeguarding. We have 2 AM safeguarding officers: overseers of each LM consult with them as necessary.
7. Risk assessment. This is being undertaken by trustees; awaiting further guidance from BYM
8. Sustainability.

During this year we have not had an AM treasurer, so a group of trustees has taken on this responsibility as a temporary measure which will continue to the end of 2021. This has been an opportunity for trustees to look at AM structures and procedures and make some changes. One has been to change to our current investment managing body.

We have re-appointed our full time employee with a new job description – that of an Area Meeting Resource Manager, to start in 2021. This gives him responsibility to look after all our resources, mainly the 5 Meeting Houses which AM owns, working with each LM. He will oversee issues such as safeguarding, health and safety, and sustainability.

This year has seen further developments in the proposed big changes for 2 of our Meeting Houses. The sale of the Sunderland MH has now gone through, and we are looking at plans for finding an alternative building that is more central to life in the city: the plans for major renovation work for the Monkseaton MH are still ongoing. The AM Resource Manager is very involved in these plans.

## **C Public Benefit**

The objective of Northumbria 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 Northumbria area Meeting and beyond.

Within NAM, income and property are used to further the Area Meeting's object by work such as: -

- i) Strengthening the life and witness of Quaker meetings both in the area of NAM and beyond;
- ii) Spreading the message of Quakers and interpreting and developing the thought and practice of the Religious Society;
- iii) Undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad;
- iv) Funding the concerns that Quaker meetings in the area of NAM or beyond have adopted or agreed to support;

- v) Providing for the pastoral care of individual members and attenders, including assistance to those in need and for education;
- vi) Maintaining and developing Quaker meeting houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world;
- vii) Administering and maintaining the organisation of Northumbria Area Meeting and contributing to the support of Britain Yearly Meeting.

BYM supports, informs, and upholds all the AMs in the UK. It also develops projects which meet the commitment to undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad (iii).

An important role of BYM is to be an important influence in the political forming of social and environmental policies, in line with Quaker values.

### **Activities**

It has been very challenging during this year of a global pandemic, to carry out our public benefit objectives in the usual way. Our Meeting Houses have had to stay closed for all or most of the year, so many of our usual activities have not been possible.

How we have coped comes under the following 3 headings.

- a) Maintaining the spiritual life of the AM by holding various Meetings for Worship virtually.
- b) Keeping in contact with and supporting each other, as well as friends and neighbours.
- c) Planning for the future.

### **a) Maintaining the spiritual life of the AM by holding various Meetings for Worship virtually**

Discovering the benefits of Zoom, we have been able to continue our Meetings for Worship each Sunday virtually. We have also had mid-week Meetings, and Durham Local Meeting initiated a weekday Epilogue open to everyone in the AM. A bonus of this use of Zoom has been the opportunities to join other local meetings for Sunday worship and social occasions. We have also discovered



people who, for various reasons have not been able to come to Meetings, can do so virtually, which means we have been more inclusive.

Newcastle has a children's Meeting, and some children have joined us in Sunday Worship on Zoom. In December, Newcastle held an all-age Meeting for Worship followed by a virtual 'Christmas party' for all which was much enjoyed.

Help was offered to Friends who had difficulty in accessing this technology. Where Friends were unable to use it, arrangements were made for them to be phoned with the details of the readings, ministry, and news of Friends that was shared, so that they were as included as possible.

### **b) Keeping in contact with and supporting each other, as well as friends and neighbours**

Many of our Friends are elderly and many live alone. Maintaining contact by regular phone calls and sending cards have been important ways of keeping our spirits up in this time of limited social meeting.

Help with food shopping, as well as giving help with other practical needs have also been means of maintaining our links with each other.

Newcastle (NLM) made a 'book' for a member who has mental disabilities and a particularly difficult speech disability, he lives a long way out of Newcastle and telephoning is not possible. The 'book' had a few words/messages on one page, and on the opposite page a picture drawn by Friends from the Meeting, and it was professionally printed, with colour. His carers were asked to give it and read it to him. The pictures would help him remember the words, and he would feel remembered and included.

Regular meetings of book groups, Bible study groups and study groups of Faith and Practice have been held. Stocksfield and Newcastle LMs have arranged talks on Zoom with discussion on topics of interest which have been very well attended and appreciated.

Looking more outward, Durham LM has worked with Durham Churches Together, reading a lesson for the cathedral's Christmas Festival of Nine

Lessons and carols, and reading at the DCT New Year service. Stocksfield, Allendale and Hexham LMs have also worked with their Churches Together.

Our Quaker Prison Chaplains have continued visiting when permitted, and sent cards and letters when not. Help has been given in collaboration with food banks: Monkseaton's MH was a distribution centre for most of the year.

Hexham debates –they are in their 13<sup>th</sup> year and have a national reputation for excellent speakers. Debates have been held virtually during this year.

### **Skimstone Arts**

This is a project, now a registered charity, which was created by 2 Newcastle LM Friends, and is given some financial support by NLM, from legacies.

Skimstone Arts works with diverse artists and those at risk of isolation, to create work with, for and about the world that matters to them.

During the period of March-December 2020, the charity faced its biggest challenge yet, to keep as much activity progressing with those most isolated during Covid 19. Two accessible projects called Here's Your Seat, and Imagine Your Seat were developed. These enabled a shift in creative focus to working 'differently connected' with their communities, especially those at high risk of mental health /social isolation by being bedroom/home bound for those in an area of high deprivation, BAME or non-UK residents and communities.

Here's Your Seat created a compilation of 17 art works – from collections of photos, songs and stories gathered from people in these communities. These were shown in a projection from a local cafe window, with support from Community Police to enable the audience to view and enjoy the projection in safety.

Imagine Your Seat was a special radio broadcast show to share the work that had been made for the project. Radio was a new medium for Skimstone Arts: recruiting a radio and collaborative artist, from Ghana, enabled them to deliver 29 sessions from August to November, from the creative team working with local residents, over Zoom, WhatsApp and phone calls. With her help in developing the new skills needed,script development, script writing and scheduling with time coding to ensure the smooth running of each daily radio

broadcast: 3x30mins. radio programmes were made. These featured the original songs, poems and stories created during the sessions by members from the local community as well as works by international artists based in Ghana, all responding to re-imagining the world we live in.

### **c) Planning for the future**

The success of using Zoom at this time, has shown us the value it will have even when we are able to use our Meeting Houses again. Stocksfield and Newcastle LMs are planning to introduce the technology for 'blended meetings', where a Meeting can be held and can include Friends who are unable to physically attend but who can be present on Zoom. It will enable us to hold other AM meetings – for training and business matters- which can include Friends who live a long distance away without the problems and costs of travel. Thus reducing our carbon footprint. This technology could also be an attractive facility to hirers of rooms.

Northumbria Conflict Resolution Network (NCRN), initiated by Newcastle LM, was launched in 2008 funded by legacy money from Newcastle LM with matching money from the Joseph Rowntree Trust, and a small grant from Newcastle City Council. It arose from Quaker concerns about violence and conflict in Newcastle, and a worry that agency responses seemed to address the symptoms of conflict rather than the causes. NCRN was therefore set up: not to try to resolve conflicts themselves, but through training, consultation, and facilitation of non-violent conflict resolution, to support others working in the field.

They have focused their work in 2020 to celebrate and support positive things local people are doing and to promote work with young people in creative ways of dealing with conflict.

Here is the report of their planning for the future.

'NCRN has connections with the Newcastle schools through the Mindfulness in Schools project, raising awareness of mindfulness among staff and enabling its inclusion in school curricula.

We are currently testing some ideas for a collaboration focussing on workplace trauma and burnout between NCRN Helping the Helpers based at Borgo

Bassino in Italy and local schools. Staff at one local school work alongside families who are dealing with issues such as trauma, challenging behaviours and in-work poverty, which, in turn, impact staff's well being. The proposed project would deliver training on trauma awareness, prevention and care.

We have also begun discussions around a project with Quaker Voices in Mental Health (QVMH). One of our NCRN members has participated in the newly formed national QVMN group, and several members attended the latest day conference. We will continue to publish the work of this group.

Finally, we are exploring possibilities for a project that would focus on resolving and mediating conflicts where they occur within our Meetings, and possible training to be provided on this'.

Northumbria Area Meeting is a founder member of Tyne and Wear Citizens which was formed in 2015, to work for social justice. The support we give is financial and also through individual involvement in the work.

Achievements this year include Sunderland's becoming the first local authority to become a Living Wage employer, and the Law Commission's recommending that misogyny be treated as a hate crime in law, and that intersectional hate be recognised. The latter issues emerged through the work of the Safer Cities group, which has worked with transport providers and supermarkets to develop policies to protect women from harassment. There has been much work to further Free School Meals entitlement during lockdowns and school holidays.

The Safer and Equal Cities group is expanding its role to take in racism, following the response to the Black Lives Matter campaign. It works with large institutions – local authorities, the NHS – to encourage them to carry out racial and religious awareness audits. The Fair, Green and Healthy group is concerned with our environment and our green spaces. The Dignity and Diversity at Work priority arose from concern about austerity and its exacerbation through the pandemic.

The issues that Tyne and Wear Citizens takes up come from listening to concerns raised from consultations with the public. A further listening campaign took place during the year, culminating in decisions on the way

forward for the next few years at a delegates assembly. This, together with the AGM, was held online.

### **Commitment to Sustainability**

In 2011 Quakers reaffirmed their commitment to act as a faith community with the 'Canterbury Commitment' (minute 36 of Britain Yearly Meeting). This called on Quakers to act in new ways – individually, as local communities, as a corporate body of faith, and politically. It recognized that the environmental crisis is enmeshed with global economic injustice and that tackling inequality is central to taking action on climate change. The Canterbury Commitment also makes clear that this is a spiritual task.

Those LMs having their own premises have all ensured that their electricity comes from green energy suppliers. Newcastle use solar panels on their MH roof. The desire for energy sustainability is important to the Meeting House planning of Monkseaton and Sunderland LMs. Those who meet in rented premises have been active in trying to improve their sustainability.

Trustees have led the way by using videoconferencing to replace some face-to-face meetings to reduce travel, during 2019. During 2020 all our gatherings, for business or social meetings, have all needed to be conducted on Zoom. This has shown us the great advantage of meeting in this way – besides being more inclusive in that people normally hindered by the difficulties of travelling quite long distances, the environmental as well as time costs are much reduced.

Alongside the use of Zoom for our local meetings activities, we have also developed our IT infrastructure, including a soft relaunch of a more attractive website and the use of a Microsoft 365 licence for the Area Meeting. These developments will continue into 2021 and we will use the Teams functionality for future meetings, and other applications for the necessary business of the charity.

### **Commitment to Equality and Diversity**

In 2017, Britain Yearly Meeting heard the call to 'examine its diversity. What ways are we already diverse? Where do our strengths and weaknesses lie in terms of inclusion? Both these questions need to be answered if we are to understand the nature and make up of this old and important faith community

that has a history of significant contribution to British and international equality.'

We hold our Equality testimony very close to our hearts, in that we, as Quakers, believe everyone is equal, which inspires us to try to change the systems that cause injustice and that stop us being genuine communities.

The way in which we have demonstrated this commitment in 2020 has been via our collaborative work with Tyne and Wear Citizens, our local Churches Together groups and in the case of Monkseaton working with a local charitable group providing food parcels for those in need.

Over the course of the year the pandemic has been able to show us increasing differences (health, deprivation etc.) between communities and we continue to show our faith in action through a wide range of initiatives. We fully expect this will continue in the future.