



# Our faith, our work

A review of the activities of Britain  
Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society  
of Friends (Quakers), 2020 – 2021





# Welcome

## Dear Friends,



The past year has been one of contrasts. On the one hand, we have faced the challenges of Covid-19 and seen our Quaker meeting houses, Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall close for long periods. On the other, we have seen rapid change, with innovative forms of Quaker worship and witness. It has truly been a year like no other.

At Britain Yearly Meeting we have been working to priorities agreed in 2019 by our trustees and Meeting for Sufferings, Quakers' national representative body:

- Thriving Quaker communities
- A sustainable and peaceful world
- Simple structures and practices.

These priorities are helping us realise our vision – set out in *Our faith in the future* – of a simple church supported by a simple charity to reinvigorate Quakerism. They have stood us in good stead during the pandemic, helping sustain Quaker communities and speaking out for a just, compassionate and peaceful world.

Friends, this is your work, carried out in your name by Friends and the staff you employ, who have worked faithfully and resolutely through the challenges of 2020. I hope you are moved, inspired and buoyed up by it, as I am.

Thank you, always, for your support.

In Friendship,

**Paul Parker**

Recording Clerk



# Thriving Quaker communities

On 15 November 2020 we held our first ever online **Yearly Meeting**. Prevented from coming together in person, more than a thousand Friends met online to worship and conduct Quaker business.

*"In this year of uncertainty and change, loss and disruption, may we find together, from that word and power and spirit, the courage to keep on responding faithfully."*

Clare Scott Booth, clerk of Yearly Meeting

From 19 July 2021 Quakers will meet again in faith and fellowship at **Yearly Meeting Gathering**. Held over three weeks, the virtual event will explore climate justice, anti-racism and gender diversity. To find out more go to [www.quaker.org.uk/ym](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym).

During the pandemic Quakers found new and unexpected ways to connect and worship together. By September 2020, three-quarters of Quaker meetings in Britain were meeting online, and a third of those were blended (both online and in person).

Our **meeting-centred support** has been helping Quaker meetings become more connected, confident and sustainable. To strengthen our network of local support, we have appointed three new **local development workers** for Scotland, East Anglia and Yorkshire, to join the five existing areas. Local development workers will become the first point of contact for meetings – on hand to help them adapt to changes. Visit [www.quaker.org.uk/mcs](http://www.quaker.org.uk/mcs).

Over the last three years, two **youth workers** – based in Bristol and Sheffield – have been working closely with Friends and meetings in a pilot project to strengthen the young Quaker community. You can read case studies and an evaluation of the pilot [here](#).

In partnership with Woodbrooke, we ran a '**Mental health** – Quaker approaches' training, equipping Friends to understand, support and promote mental health. Read [this blog](#) about Quaker experiences of mental ill health.



Quaker family weekends at Rookhow meeting

## Simpler meetings

Our Simpler Meetings project has found and shared ways to run Quaker meetings more simply. By reducing the burden on role-holders, we can free up time and energy for spiritual growth, witness and outreach.

In spring 2021 we collaborated with Woodbrooke on a successful series of online seminars. The series, which attracted over 1,000 bookings, covered the many ways Quakers have found to run their meetings more simply. Friends explored simpler approaches for role-holders and those running smaller meetings, new ways of using technology, and how area meetings can better work together.

*“You’ve brought the idea that we can think differently out into the daylight. Now it’s up to us to continue the conversation.”*

A Friend’s feedback on the Simpler Meetings Project



Among the findings of the project was that Quaker meetings without a meeting house can and do thrive. Find out what else we've learned and how you could help your meeting at [www.quaker.org.uk/simpler](http://www.quaker.org.uk/simpler).

## Engaging young adult Quakers

**Young adult Friends** are a vital part of our Quaker community. A project to support 18- to 35-year-olds in their engagement with Quakerism has made a real difference.

Since 2017 the number of young adult Quaker groups in Britain has trebled, and we've seen a significant growth in attendance at Yearly Meeting. Cost is often a barrier to engagement, so we've helped over 100 young adults to attend events and courses at Woodbrooke. And a new grants scheme has so far awarded £6,535.

Nearly 90 per cent of the young adults we surveyed said they now feel more connected to the wider Quaker community and more spiritually nourished. Many cited improved communications – a dedicated newsletter, **podcast** and video series, plus a wider reach across our social media channels.

Changes to our national structures have helped increase the number of young adult Quakers serving centrally, from 15 in 2017 to 34 in 2020, including two as BYM Trustees.

Visit [www.quaker.org.uk/youngadults](http://www.quaker.org.uk/youngadults) for more information.

### Case study: Local development worker

“Area meeting trustees were planning to sell the meeting house of a very small meeting at Llandrindod Wells (Southern Marches Area Meeting), which some Friends felt had become too much of a burden to maintain. Other Friends, however, were passionate about continuing to make the space available to a group reaching out to the local community for adult education, as well as maintaining a Quaker presence.

“I worked with Friends to allow time for further discernment and to produce a business plan backed by a spirit-led vision. These were taken to area meeting, which strongly supported plans for a long-term lease instead of sessional lettings and for engaging an agency to manage the building.”

Local Development Worker for Wales and the Southern Marches



# A sustainable and peaceful world

We support Quakers in Britain to take action for a more just and peaceful world. We work with partners in the UK and overseas to build peace and promote nonviolence.

In 2020 we held our **Summer Series** on the theme of 'Where our witness is'. Of the 1,000 participants, a fifth were new to Quakerism.

In August our **Sanctuary Everywhere programme**, together with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, submitted evidence to an inquiry into **Channel crossings**. We argued that the most effective way of preventing human trafficking is to create safe and legal routes to the UK.

To mark International Migrants Day, we delivered a **Quaker statement on migration** to Home Secretary Priti Patel. Friends also sent crocheted

butterflies embroidered with the message 'Migration is beautiful' to MPs to urge them to back compassionate immigration reform.

We worked with other campaigners to secure a key amendment to the **Overseas Operations Bill**. We believe the bill will result in injustice for both soldiers and the victims of war crimes. After the amendment was backed by the House of Lords, the government agreed to remove the proposed exemption from prosecution for those accused of torture or genocide.

We supported our partners in **East Africa** to calm tensions driven by the pandemic. They helped communities call on their governments to provide greater support to families, moderated conflicts, and helped local groups tackle domestic violence and amplify victims' voices.



Our Sanctuary Everywhere programme manager delivering the **Quaker statement on migration** to the Home Office. Photo by Phil Wood for Quakers in Britain

Since having to withdraw its volunteers from the region due to Covid, the **Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)** has focussed on its advocacy work. Online tools such as virtual workshops have extended the programme's reach and allowed it to continue pressing for an end to the occupation.

## Build back better

In June 2020 we joined a coalition of over 80 organisations to launch a campaign for a green and just recovery from the pandemic. **Build Back Better** brings together students, teachers, healthcare workers, NGOs, and faith groups to campaign for a recovery that protects public services, creates secure and sustainable jobs, and tackles inequality and the climate crisis.

Find ways to lobby for a green and just recovery in **this blog**, which includes a briefing for Quakers.

*"The need to avert future crises, the likelihood of high unemployment, the hardship suffered by many during the pandemic, and the public support for a green recovery have combined to create a real imperative for action. We must not miss this moment."*

From our **submission** to the government's Comprehensive Spending Review, where we set out our priorities for a recovery that benefits both people and planet.

Visit [www.quaker.org.uk/social-justice](http://www.quaker.org.uk/social-justice).

## Preparing for COP26

head of November's UN climate talks in Glasgow, Quakers have joined the UK climate movement in calling for radical action to reverse climate breakdown.

In the autumn we ran nine interfaith climate workshops with Christian Aid and Faith for the Climate. The workshops focussed on helping people of faith in Leeds, Leicester and Manchester develop their skills and build campaign networks.

We also helped coordinate the COP26 Faiths Task Group, urging the UK government to honour its

commitment to end the use of public money for overseas fossil fuel projects.

We recently supported a group of Quakers to organise a weekend of action called 'Journey to COP26'. Those of all faiths and none were invited to join Friends on a pilgrimage to a place they consider sacred.

We have prepared an **action guide** for Friends, and our '**COP26 actions**' page suggests ways to get involved.

Visit [www.quaker.org.uk/climatejustice](http://www.quaker.org.uk/climatejustice).

## Peace education

Quakers support the growing call for **peace education** to be made available to all.

Since 2019 we have been working with the Quaker Council for European Affairs on a project to strengthen peace education across Europe. Together, we have facilitated workshops for EU policymakers, academics and practitioners, and developed new advocacy tools.

In May 2021 we held a three-day online conference that looked at how education can create sustainable peace and heal divisions. Over 500 people from 63 countries heard from speakers from Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Rwanda.

It was inspiring to hear directly from young people. Quasim, a young Afghan peace volunteer, shared his experience of teaching literacy and nonviolence to street children, while young people from Britain spoke of the importance of restorative approaches and empathy.

We will continue to support the growing number of grassroots Quaker peace education projects and increase our advocacy.

*"Peace education has the power to change narratives and teach children that war is neither normal nor inevitable. Only fear limits us from seeing opportunities to actively create peace."*

Atiaf Alwazir, Head of QCEA's Peace Programme

Visit [www.quaker.org.uk/peace-education](http://www.quaker.org.uk/peace-education).



# Simple structures and practices

As well as supporting Quaker meetings to consider what we've learned from our **Simpler Meetings Project**, we've been looking at how to make the most of our national resources by simplifying our national committee structures, including nominations. We are introducing online training for committees, improving communication and reviewing committee cycles.

The way we communicate our faith and our work needs to be clear and accessible to Quakers and the public alike. We have a new communications strategy to make our messages simpler and more focussed. By better articulating the purpose and impact of our work, we can engage new audiences and funders.

**Friends House** and **Swarthmoor Hall** are home to unique collections of books, artwork and artefacts relating to Quakerism. As a first step towards managing and preserving these collections in a coordinated way, we have been reviewing them with a focus on enabling wider audiences to access and engage with our collections.

## Safeguarding

How organisations keep people safe has received scrutiny over the last year. We engaged an external safeguarding agency to **review** our historic cases, which concluded that there were no high-risk cases needing further investigation. We have adopted a new secure safeguarding database. We aim to ensure that all safeguarding incidents and concerns are logged on this single system.

We launched new model documents for Quaker area meetings, whose trustees are responsible for safeguarding in local meetings. These are already being adopted in many area meetings, and we are encouraging them to renew their safeguarding policies by the end of 2022. We will provide clarification and support where it is needed.

Our trustees have adopted a substantially revised BYM Safeguarding Policy and a new Online Safeguarding Policy. The new Safeguarding Officer is helping us to develop our safeguarding practice



Social time after meeting for worship at Hexham Quaker Meeting.



as well as supporting area meeting safeguarding coordinators. Area meetings can access specialist advice and training from the independent Christian safeguarding charity, **Thirtyone:eight**.

You can find further details at [www.quaker.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.quaker.org.uk/safeguarding).

## Leeds hub

We're delighted to have a new base for Quaker work – a self-contained office attached to Quaker Meeting House, Woodhouse Lane in Leeds. This is a milestone in realising our vision of becoming less London-centric, more supportive of flexible working, and better placed to serve the needs of Quaker communities across Britain.



The office will be a base for action with Quakers in the north of England, with space for national committee meetings and events in the meeting house next door.

# Finance at a glance

In this challenging year, we were overwhelmed by the generosity shown by individual Friends, attenders and supporters.

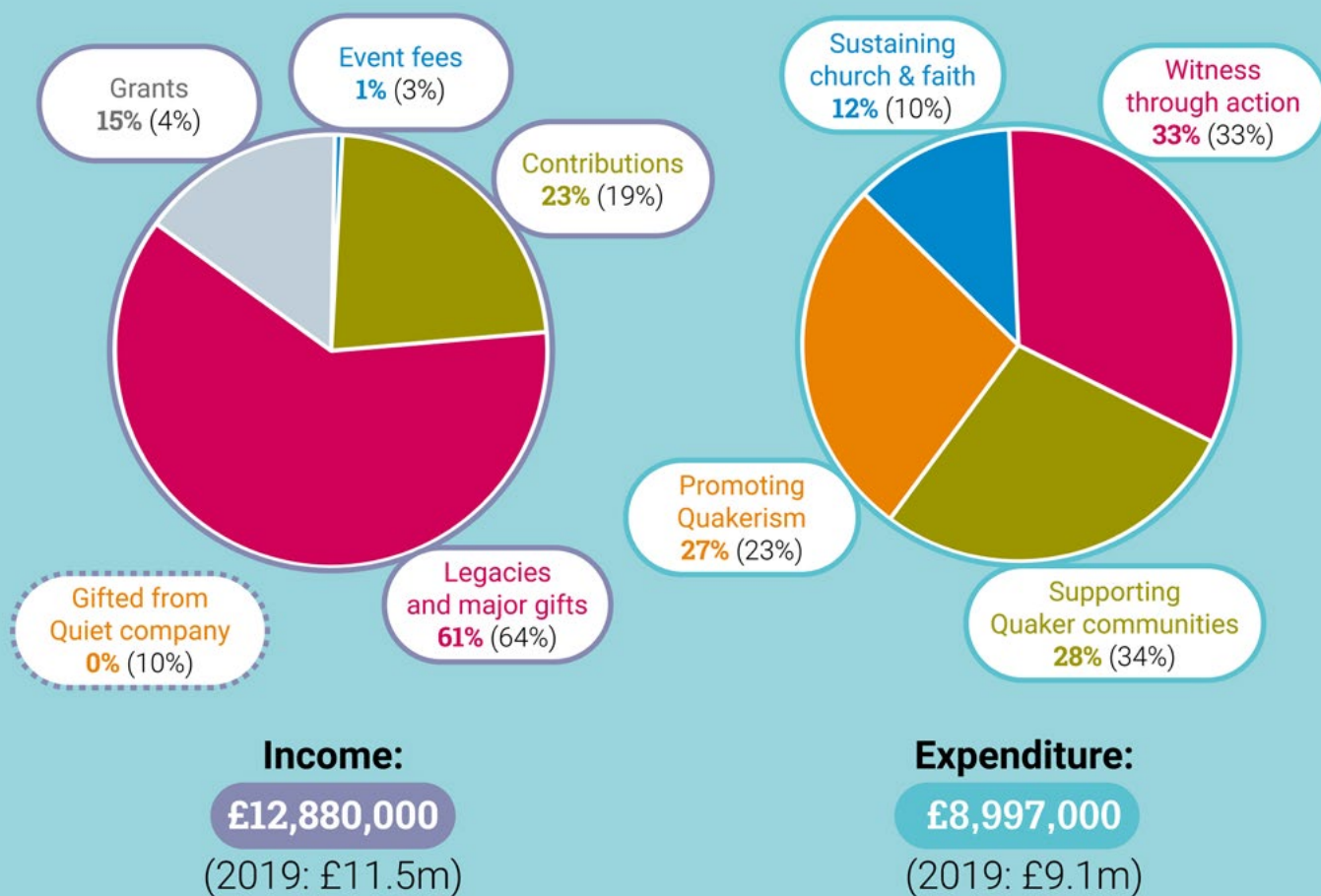
Donations from individuals nearly doubled from 2019. Contributions from meetings also showed a small increase, despite the challenging financial situation many of those meetings faced. We are grateful to all those Friends who remembered us with a gift in their will. These gifts form a vital part of our income.

This was especially valuable after Quiet Company, our trading subsidiary, had to close its doors for most of the year. There was some activity during the summer months, when restrictions were lifted,

but the closure meant a 70% fall in revenue and the majority of staff placed on furlough. For the first time in its history, the hospitality company reported a net loss and was unable to donate any profits to the charity.

The valuable contribution from Friends meant that we were largely able to maintain our level of charitable spending at around £9 million. This was spent on our charitable work in a similar way to 2019. However, the shift to online working and meeting brought fresh challenges to communicating within the Quaker community and the wider world. As a result, we spent more on “promoting Quakerism” than in the previous year.

## Income and expenditure 2020





An anti-Policing Bill protest in Aberystwyth, May 2021. Photo by Ben Robinson for Quakers in Britain

Despite the uncertainties of the pandemic, Quakers in Britain remains financially sustainable and forward-looking. We continue to invest in all aspects of our organisation to ensure stability now and for the years ahead.

Placing local development workers across the whole yearly meeting by 2023 supports spirit-centred, strong faith communities. The full inclusion of children and young adults in all aspects of Quakerism remains a key priority. Our work on behalf of Quakers for a sustainable and peaceful world is as vital as ever.

We are changing structures and practices to forge a simpler and more efficient organisation that can make the greatest difference in our faith and the world with finite resources.

For more detail about our finances, you can read the full 2020 report and financial statements at [www.quaker.org.uk/annualreport](http://www.quaker.org.uk/annualreport).



# Funding our work

*"Contributions from Friends and meetings will be crucial this year and in the coming years, to enable us to continue to do the work in the world we hold dear."*

Linda Batten, Treasurer

## Thank you

All the work featured in this review is only possible with your support. Thank you for ensuring that Quaker faith and witness will continue far into the future.

To find out more about how to give through these means, and how we use the funds we receive, email [contributions@quaker.org.uk](mailto:contributions@quaker.org.uk).

## Giving

Supporting Quaker work gives us the means and the profile to make a real impact, as a thriving faith community working nationally and internationally for peace, justice, equality and sustainability.

To find out how to support this work with a gift visit [www.quaker.org.uk/giving](http://www.quaker.org.uk/giving).

## Legacy Giving

In 2020 gifts in wills were especially important for BYM and supported our work during a year of great uncertainty. The generosity and deep values of Friends who came before are very much by our side. They put their faith into action for a sustainable and peaceful world.

If you would like to give the gift of equality, peace, truth, justice and simplicity to the next generation of Quakers, please visit [www.quaker.org.uk/legacy](http://www.quaker.org.uk/legacy).

*"I give because I deeply value the Quaker mix of encouragement for spiritual exploration, work for social justice and equality and environmental concern. Britain Yearly Meeting is us: it both organises our wider contribution to society and nourishes our grass roots."*

Margaret Laurie, Quaker



Jesus Lane Quaker Meeting.



# Moving forwards with your support

Despite the uncertainty of the world around us, our vision for thriving Quaker communities and a sustainable and peaceful world remains clear.

Restrictions haven't stopped the work, witness and worship that strengthens and empowers our community.

With your support – spiritual, physical and financial – we continue to work towards having thriving Quaker communities, simpler structures and helping to create a sustainable and peaceful world.

You can support us financially by making a donation or leaving a legacy at [www.quaker.org.uk/giving](http://www.quaker.org.uk/giving).

You can stay up to date with our work by signing up to our Quake! newsletter at [www.quaker.org.uk/quake](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quake).

You can give your time in many ways. Find out more at [www.quaker.org.uk/give-time](http://www.quaker.org.uk/give-time).

Thank you.



Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Quaker unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship – a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly – internally, in relationships with others, and with the world. Local meetings for worship are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power. The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal.

This leads Quakers to put faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

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