

Why the Quaker Centre Bookshop and café remain closed

By this time of year, Friends House would normally have hosted hundreds of thousands of Quakers and non-Quakers, and we would be welcoming people every day of the week for worship, work or just a good catch-up over coffee. But 2021 is not a normal year for any of us and things still look different.

Having been closed for much of winter and spring, Friends House reopened to room hirers when restrictions were lifted on 19 July and booking enquiries have picked up rapidly since then. We have welcomed many people back to Friends House over the summer, hosting events including blended meetings for BYM Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings, and the Refugee Council's 70th anniversary celebration in July. The money made by Quiet Company directly funds the work of Quakers in Britain, so being able to reopen to hirers is a big step forward.

The bookshop continues to operate online, adding new titles regularly – this year's Swarthmore Lecture has been particularly popular. As well as filling bookshelves across this country, we have been shipping as far afield as the USA, Turkey and Taiwan, although we have recently had to pause sales to the EU.

I also want to take a moment to publicly thank the staff team. They have been consistently brilliant in handling the challenges the last eighteen months have posed, and I am delighted their efforts are being recognised as finalists in two categories at the London Venue and Catering Awards in November.

All of this has been happening despite the external pressures faced by the hospitality industry. We set high standards for the food and drink served and the welcome given to all who visit Friends House, but Brexit and Covid-19 are affecting our ability to meet these standards. Disruption to our suppliers means we are struggling to provide the usual range of responsibly-sourced refreshments. We also have a number of vacancies and are actively recruiting, but finding people with the right experience is more difficult than ever. Given this, we need to open only as much as is feasible, and carefully consider the impact on staff.

This means the café and bookshop will stay closed for the time being, and will reopen when we are confident we can do so properly. The library is currently closed for refurbishment and, all being well, we expect it to reopen in early 2022.

I realise all this will be disappointing to many, and as someone who has had more than a few meetings – planned or otherwise – in the Quaker Centre, I feel this too. It is a tough decision to have to make, but we are guided by our commitments to staff, customers and the Quaker community.

The staff and board of Quiet Company will keep making every effort to fully reopen Friends House, and I look forward to the return of the usual mix of activity. In the meantime, we are grateful for your patience, support and upholding. We will be posting updates on social media and our website, and I would encourage you to check these.

Matt Baker

Clerk of the board of Quiet Company [6 October 2021](#)

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