



Britain Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Our faith in action
Quaker work in 2016



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These headings relate to *Our faith in the future*, which expresses the priorities of Quakers throughout Britain. It describes what we want our Society to become, and guides all our work.

Letter from the Recording Clerk

In 1682 the Quaker William Penn wrote that “True godliness don’t turn [people] out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it.” For our Quaker movement here in Britain, this has meant both maintaining a strong community of faithful seekers and working together to build a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. Locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, we gather together as Friends to worship, discern the will of God for our community, and support each other in active witness. Quakers always have.

The centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting – which you can read about in this report – is a key part of maintaining our faith community and taking our vision and message out into the world. Our work builds on local worship and witness to do those things that can only be

done nationally or on a larger scale. We work for and with Quakers and their meetings. Some of our work is on issues where we know we are involved for the long haul – peace, disarmament, criminal justice. Other programmes respond to the needs of the moment – the place of young adults in our local worshipping communities, or responding to the challenges of forced migration.

We know our work makes a difference – you can read about that in these pages or in the impact section of our annual report (published separately), or you can ask those involved with it – as partners, committee members, beneficiaries or participants – to tell you about their experience. We also know our work can only happen with the support of Friends from across our yearly meeting – those who give time and service; those who make financial contributions or who



pledge legacies; those who participate in the discernment of the priorities and projects we work on; and those whose creativity, determination and commitment inspires us all. You are all part of this wonderful movement and its work.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Parker". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Paul Parker
Recording Clerk

Letter from the Clerk of Trustees

In these challenging and uncertain times, the need for Quaker witness, grounded in our worship and in the life of the Spirit, is as urgent as ever. The vibrancy programme, the Reading *Quaker faith & practice* project, and Being Friends Together are all helping us to strengthen our local Quaker communities, enabling us to meet the challenges facing the world. Meanwhile, our Engaging Young Adult Friends research has emphasised the need to do more for our younger Friends.

Our meeting houses, Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall continue to be tangible reminders of our Quaker heritage as well as valuable community resources. Working collaboratively to challenge housing inequality and military presence in secondary schools is just a part of how we seek to make the world a fairer, more peaceful and sustainable place for all. We

cannot do it all, but our trustees and central committees are working ever more closely to see where our work can be most effective.

We are a do-it-together church. Your role in this – giving as much of your time, your service, your financial support and your prayers as you are able – is an essential part of being a Quaker.



Ingrid Greenhow
Clerk of Trustees



How you can support our work

Contribute time

Serve on a committee, volunteer at an event or join the Quaker Life Network: find out more at www.quaker.org.uk/givetime or call 020 7663 1121.

Contribute money

You can give directly or through your meeting: visit www.quaker.org.uk/givemoney or call 020 7663 1015.

Meeting for worship is the bedrock of living as a Quaker

In worship we become one with the Spirit, with each other and with our true selves. The Spirit is the source of strength and guidance for all we are and do. Our way of worship is open to all, and we are making it more widely known.

Vibrancy programme

The Vibrancy in Meetings Pilot Programme is doing something new for Quakers in Britain – exploring whether having locally based staff can help meetings to thrive as communities with a vital Quaker ministry, becoming stronger, more connected, more confident, more engaged, and more sustainable. Here, Helen Chambers talks about her involvement with the programme and her hopes for it as it develops.

Helen Chambers

I was finishing my Eva Koch scholarship – on Quaker families, especially adults with children and young people at meetings – when I saw an ad on the Quaker Life Network for people to join the vibrancy programme's steering group. It looked like an opportunity to honour the things I'd learned. After a robust selection process, trustees discerned that I had useful experience, even though I'd never been on any national Quaker committees.



It has been exciting to assist in these early stages, and there is significant work ahead. We knew when we were appointing a national coordinator that we needed someone who listened, an organised enabler, and someone with strong spiritual roots. We found an excellent candidate in Rachel Matthews; it's going to be interesting to see the work develop. Quakerism is in a good place to be a faith fit for the 21st century, and meetings need to be prepared for it.

It's too early to tell what the outcomes will be, but I feel confident in the integrity of our process. We're setting up good evaluation systems because we want to learn from meetings what has worked and what might need to change. What's key is our ambition: for a vibrant Quaker community with stronger, more connected, confident and sustainable local meetings that care for each other and the world.

Everything we do will go into finding ways to ensure we help achieve the objectives outlined in *Our faith in the future*.

Being Friends Together

The Being Friends Together resources are already having a big impact on meetings. In 2016, Quaker Life, together with Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, offered further training for people willing to become meeting visitors – people who can offer guidance and support to meetings that want to access and explore the online library. There is a wide range of material available, including support for working with children and all-age learning. These are being developed and improved continually, with a range of new material coming in 2017. It's important that this isn't just an academic process. The aim is to help local meetings strengthen and enrich their life and learning together. More than a hundred meetings have already subscribed to Being Friends Together, and each subscription provides access to the website for as many people in the meeting as wish to explore it.

Exploring worship Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 15–17 July 2016

Children should always feel welcome at meeting for worship and in 2016 a lot of work was done to make sure that they are. In July Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre ran a course for 8- to 12-year-olds on 'Exploring worship'. It asked important questions like 'What is God?', 'What is

worship?' and 'What is a Quaker?'. The children who attended – there was a separate programme for parents and carers – listened to stories, watched videos, played team games and used some creative approaches to discuss how and why worship worked for them.

Four of the children acted as roving reporters over the

weekend and they had lots to say about what happened: "It was a great help to learn how and what to focus our minds on in meeting. This weekend has helped me develop a deeper understanding of God and Quakerism," said one. Another reported that "I really liked the whole course because it was really fun, but the actual Quaker meanings weren't hidden behind the excitement."



Young People's Programme, 27–30 May, Hertfordshire. The Young People's Programme is a residential event for 11- to 15-year-olds that takes place at the same time as Yearly Meeting. Photo: Britain Yearly Meeting



466 local and area meetings
(266 have children's meetings)

13,153 members
(255 new in 2016)

7,925 attenders



Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age

All are heard, valued and supported both in our needs and our leadings. Everyone's contribution is accepted according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included. There are clear and effective ways of working together on shared concerns. Fellowship and fun strengthen the bonds between us, enhancing a loving community.

End-of-life issues

The experience of loss can deepen our faith but can also shake it. Faith at the end of life may be a comfort but also a challenge – *Quaker faith & practice* advises us to prepare practically and spiritually. Are there ways in which we can help each other to be prepared? As an organisation we understand that we have a responsibility to explore these questions in truth and openness. This is not easy: it requires courage and sensitivity. In April 2016 Quaker Life Representative Council met to discuss the topic 'Sharing our end-of-life stories – discovering Quaker understandings of dying and death'. Meri Goad, part of the planning group, discusses what that meant for her.

Meri Goad

I have a natural aversion to pain. I avoid discomfort, however it might arise. So when my local meeting suggested a discussion around end-of-life issues, I could have assumed it wasn't for me. But I soon realised these issues are as close to me as anyone. Besides my ageing parents, my husband is considerably older than me and it's taken me over 20 years to even consider that our marriage won't go on forever. Death and dying cannot be escaped.



This subject became the focus of our conference in April 2016. Instead of running away from the issues, I decided to embrace them. I could see the care and compassion with which the subject was being handled.

The conference raised many aspects for consideration. For me, one of the main benefits was being able to listen to others' stories and feel a sense of solidarity with them.

The conference also gave me vital reassurance: I now feel able to face difficult situations in the future. The End-of-Life Issues Group Coordinator is a treasured member of my meeting and a dear personal friend. She has taught me a great deal about how to acknowledge and deal with grief.

Britain Yearly Meeting has given me the opportunity to begin living life to the full, meeting life's challenges and responding with love. I now have to start putting it into practice – for the rest of my life!

Young Quakers Participation Day

Friends House, London,
3 December 2016

Teenage Quakers sometimes find it difficult to feel part of Quakerism in Britain. In December, coming together with Meeting for Sufferings – our national representative body – a number of them discussed the main barriers to participation. These included a lack of time, distance, the high cost of many Quaker events, fear of standing out and not being good enough. Some found that explaining Quakerism left them frustrated, and felt reluctant to do so.

The day provided an opportunity to get young people involved in the decisions that affect them, while also hearing about the challenges and opportunities that exist for them as members of the Quaker community. The day aimed to strengthen the connection between young people and their area meeting.

Attendees were encouraged to explore what Quakerism meant to them as individuals and to express themselves through silence, discussion and art. Many left feeling that the Participation Day would help them relate more to their area and local meetings.

Engaging Young Adult Friends

In early 2016 we launched a research project into how young adults engage with the

Society. People aged 18 to 35 were asked about how they relate to their Quaker identity and what encourages or impedes their involvement with Quakerism.

The respondents were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of the Society, but the project identified several reasons why young Quakers find it difficult to engage with meetings. People in this age range tend to be

more transient than most, and working life makes Sunday meetings difficult. There were also some concerns about how meetings can condescend to younger attenders. The survey reported that 51 per cent of young adult Friends attend meeting occasionally, hardly ever or never; these statistics demanded a response.

We recruited an Engagement Project Officer to work through these issues and to better connect young Friends to the life of the Society. Over the next three years they will work with local meetings and other groups around the country to devise ways of making young adults feel more welcomed and involved.



At their Participation Day in December young Quakers explored the 'Be the change' resource. Photo: Britain Yearly Meeting

Quakers in Britain are:

61.9% female
37.9% male
0.2% other*

92% over 16
8% under 16



*We're not sure this figure is accurate. We don't think everyone is aware that we use this category. Contact us if you can think of sensitive ways we can collect this data.

All Friends understand and live by Quaker discipline

Our discipline is actually “Letting go and letting God”; not “Thou shalt” nor “I will” but “What does Love require of us?” It works when we understand it and practise it. Because we understand it, we can share it with others. Our testimony guides us, but we have to work on what it means for each of us personally.

Living our beliefs

Living our beliefs is a short book exploring the faith and practice of Quakers. It was compiled and edited in partnership with young Quakers from across Britain. Josie Blyth was part of the team that put it together.

Josie Blyth

I got involved with the creation of *Living our beliefs* by applying online. It had been brought to my attention by my parents and I thought it would be an amazing opportunity. I was part of the editorial team, whose work included selecting appropriate quotes from other young people's events and formatting and arranging the layout of the book.

For me the book is a symbol of a development and understanding. I feel it is a way for young people to connect with Quaker values and gain a deeper and clearer understanding of those values, which can help lead to the creation of more personal ideas.

My involvement with the book has contributed to my depth of understanding of, and belief in, Quaker values. And, like *Quaker faith & practice*, it brings to light the many and varied beliefs of Quakers.

From my experience of hearing people talk about the book, it seems to have made an impact on people of all ages and can be used for many purposes. It is useful for those new to Quakerism as a way of becoming accustomed to the everyday workings of the Society of Friends. It can also be used to find a simpler yet thought-provoking passage or quote as guidance in or outside of meeting.



Yearly Meeting 2016

Yearly Meeting 2016 saw Quakers in Britain come together to worship, make decisions and spend time as a community. It was an opportunity for us to learn, practice, improve, and be inspired before returning to our local meetings. 2016 was the second of a three-year consideration of 'Living out our faith in the world'. Friends thought about how we use our gifts and how we recognise, test and support our concerns. We also began to think about movement-building, which will be discussed more fully at Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017.

More than a thousand people, plus over a hundred children and young people, met to consider Quaker tradition and our own experience, always mindful of the contemporary challenges. Some of the questions we asked ourselves will become even more important in 2017: How could your meeting listen to your local

community and forge alliances to understand the concerns of those who live around you? Are we, like John, more comfortable in the wilderness, existing prophetically but peripherally? Or are we willing to join with our communities to turn the tables at the temple, if necessary?

Reading *Quaker faith & practice*

The Reading *Quaker faith & practice* project has been

running since autumn 2015. Meeting for Sufferings decided to support it for some important reasons, the main one being that Quakers need to know and understand what's in the book so that we can follow it! It will also help the relevant committees identify when and where it needs revising. Together we can benefit from its richness and diversity; as a community we are drawn closer together by engaging with

something that is at the very core of our faith.

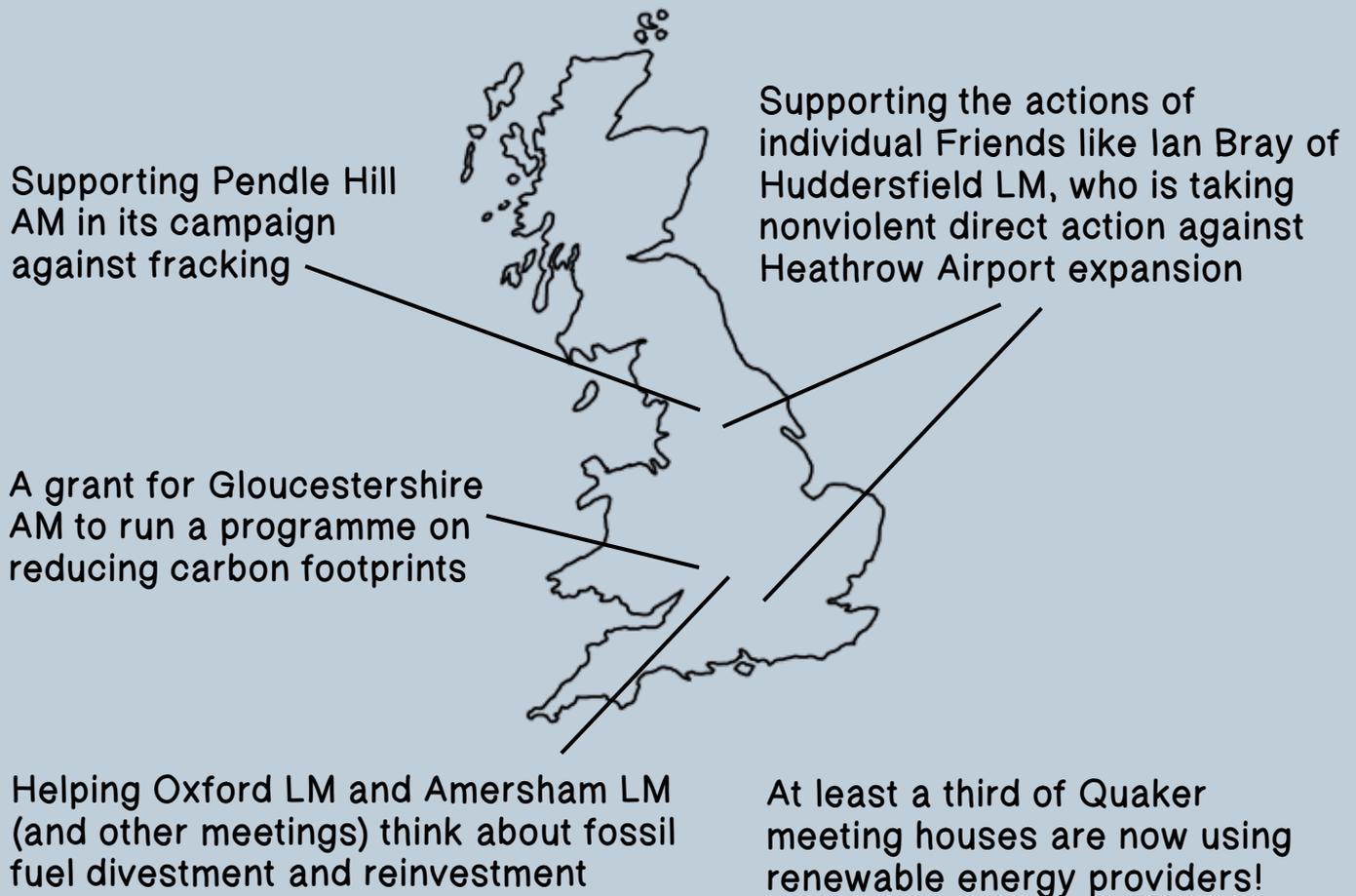
Thousands of people have engaged with the project on Facebook, and most Quaker meetings have set up groups to explore their reading. The project's impact will become clear when it ends in 2017. But the following realisation from a Friend is typical: "There's a lot in there I'd never read, or had forgotten."



Yearly Meeting 2016. Photo: © Mike Pinches for Britain Yearly Meeting

Encouraging sustainability around the country

— just a few examples from our Economic Justice & Sustainability team



Quaker values are active in the world

Our lives speak peace, equality, respect for the earth and all its inhabitants. We offer friendship to all and solidarity to the marginalised. We speak truth to power with love. We hold those in power in the Light. We find creative and nonviolent ways to get our message across. We are in this for the long haul; we're not afraid to take risks. We are called to live in the place where our "deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet".

Turning the Tide Rwanda project

African peacebuilders, who are Quakers or involved with Quaker work, make a real difference in Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda. They work together, often transforming tension and violence in their communities into a commitment to peace. Thierry Jean-Pierre Manzendore discusses his work in northern Rwanda.

Thierry Jean-Pierre Manzendore

I am a community-trained activist with BYM's Turning the Tide (TTT) Programme in Byumba in northern Rwanda. The programme, which trains groups to challenge injustice using the tools of nonviolence, came to Rwanda at the right time: it has given us a new way of viewing and understanding injustice in our communities.

Domestic violence is common here, but we didn't know why. A TTT workshop helped us to explore nonviolence, power and change, and to analyse injustice to find its root causes. We then focused on children's rights, another issue here. Their basic human rights – access to food, healthcare and education – are often violated by their parents and their community.

We found that domestic violence is to blame. Many are ignorant of the harm it causes – especially to children – and it continues because it is kept hidden. Nobody was tackling the problem, not even our community leaders. But TTT helped us to organise a campaign to raise awareness of the consequences of inaction.

Our campaign ran for three weeks in late 2016. We formed into small groups and visited

all of the local villages. We talked to people about domestic violence and their experiences of it. The end of our short campaign was the start of something truly positive! People have begun to report cases of violence and injustice to their community leaders, who now take action.

Thanks to nonviolence training, we feel empowered and equipped to respond positively to injustice. We now have a committee in Byumba, and when there are reports of injustice we come together to use the skills we have learnt to take action.

TTT has changed my life! I am here to say that positive social change *can* happen. I am sure we can do more. We want to hold workshops for all of the different groups of people here. Nonviolence must become a part of our culture.

Amahoro! (Peace)



Thriving on ‘the Friendly Way’

In 2015 the Friends House Hospitality Company decided to give its business a full expression of Quaker testimonies. In 2016 the company’s quest to be heartfelt, loving, responsible and pioneering has delivered some exceptional results. Customer satisfaction is at 99 per cent, while staff continue to develop their skills, many obtaining NVQs. The business is sustainable and environmentally responsible.

This value-led approach has not compromised bottom-line results: quite the opposite. There has been an increase in bookings and a full refurbishment of conference facilities. As a result the company has almost doubled its Gift Aid donations to BYM.

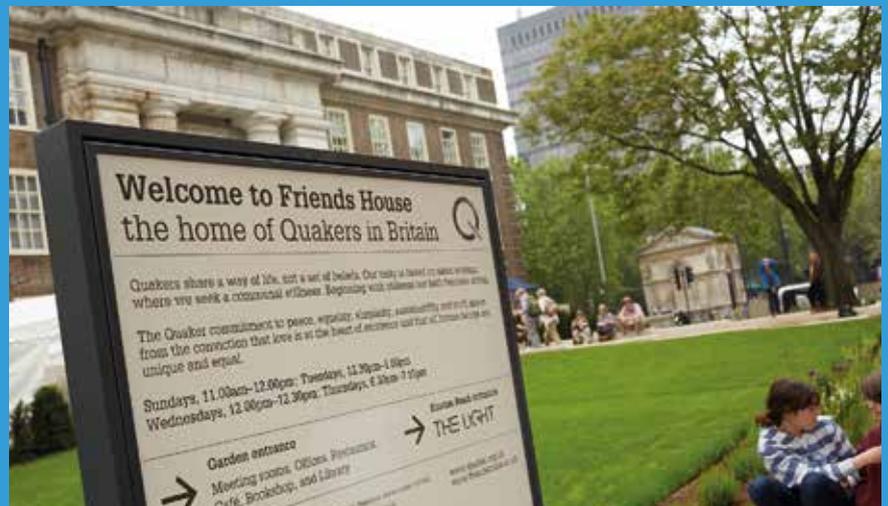
QUNO: Human rights and refugees

Some of our most effective work is done when we support external Quaker bodies. The

Quaker United Nations Office works with people in the UN, multilateral organisations, government delegations, and non-governmental organisations to achieve changes in international standards and practice.

For some time QUNO has been advocating on behalf of children whose parents are facing the death penalty. As a result of this advocacy, paragraphs on the rights of

these children were included in a Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution. In 2016 QUNO staff also campaigned to defend the children of prisoners, and they updated a briefing paper, *Children of Incarcerated Parents and Minorities in Criminal Justice Systems*, to demonstrate the need for more action. This was used to successfully advocate for the safeguarding of children of incarcerated parents.



Welcoming visitors to Friends House, which had its garden remodelled in 2016. Photo: © 2016 Mike Pinches for Britain Yearly Meeting

Making a difference around the world

Geneva:
representing
Friends'
concerns at
the UN

Ecumenical
accompaniment in
Israel/Palestine

Conciliation
work in South
Asia

Campaigning for
nonviolent social
change in Kenya



Nonviolence
training in
Burundi

Plus, grants for:

- peer mediation in Cape Town
- safe water in Congo
- empowering women in Tanzania
- permaculture in Zambia.

Quakers are well known and widely understood

We are active in our local communities, reaching out in friendship, making more use of our meeting houses for events and for renting or lending out. All members are ready and equipped to explain our Quaker way confidently and clearly to anyone who asks, as well as to speak publicly on issues of concern. We share our practices as appropriate and make full use of relevant media to reach out widely. In an increasingly divided world, we try to offer “patterns and examples” of a caring community.

World War I centenary

Since 1660 the Religious Society of Friends has opposed all wars. World War I was no different and many Quakers resisted the call to arms. The centenary of the Military Service Act, and its provision for conscientious objection, was an opportunity for us to give witness to our work. Peter Rutter worked with us to help tell the story through his family history.

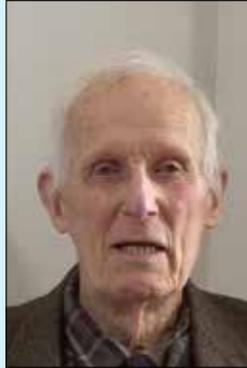
Peter Rutter

The BBC wanted to talk to a Quaker who was a descendant of a Quaker who was at the Battle of the Somme. I think it took a while to find me. In the library at Friends House, staff found records of train number 17 run by the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) carrying the injured. They found an autograph book signed by my father, William Farley Rutter. A letter in his papers, kept in the library, mentioned Sidcot School sending a cricket set to my father at the front. BYM's Media Officer rang the school – and they knew my family.

As a practising solicitor, I am well used to speaking but I felt a bit naked when exposed to the media. The Media Officer set up the interviews and helped me think about what we would like to tell the audience.

The radio interview was about my father. He didn't say much about the war and I can understand that, having been through World War II in the FAU myself. War is a bloody business and indiscriminate, and the fact of the matter is it blows limbs and heads, teeth, arms and legs to bits in a horrifying way to watch. We need to talk about all this while we're still here.

I feel very strongly about Quakers diminishing in numbers. I am happy to commend Quaker values to the world. Quakers have a legitimate claim to be more representative of what Jesus had in mind when he said "follow me".



Swarthmoor Hall

Swarthmoor Hall continues to play a key role in communicating Quakerism to the world. This year the number of day visitors to the Hall increased by 30 per cent, with consistently good feedback – “Wonderful insight into the history of the Quaker movement. Peaceful and enchanting, well worth it” – and in its first year of opening the Barn Café attracted 10,000 customers.

In 2016 the number of residential pilgrimages increased from three to ten. These attracted Friends from all over the world. One participant said “It was a peak experience in my Quaker life” while non-Quakers have also responded warmly to the experience of staying at the Hall: “Absolutely fantastic location. The rooms are extremely clean and comfortable. The grounds are beautiful and very well kept. Love it.”

Trident

The Quaker commitment to peace was, as always, a big part of our work in 2016, and Quakers were a very visible part of the campaign to see nuclear weapons abolished. Despite the UK government voting to renew the Trident weapons system, more people have heard our witness on the subject as QPSW staff travelled the country on a mission to educate and inform.



In partnership with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and 20 other national organisations, Quakers conducted a mass lobby of MPs in the Westminster Parliament. Young Quakers also got involved, joining a collection of youth and student groups to call for a ban.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, made a key speech in Parliament Square, where he

said “We see something of God in everyone and seek to love our neighbours as ourselves. A teaching which is present in many religions. This means we cannot threaten others with weapons of mass destruction. We will build a more secure future by modelling in our own actions the behaviour that we ask of others.”

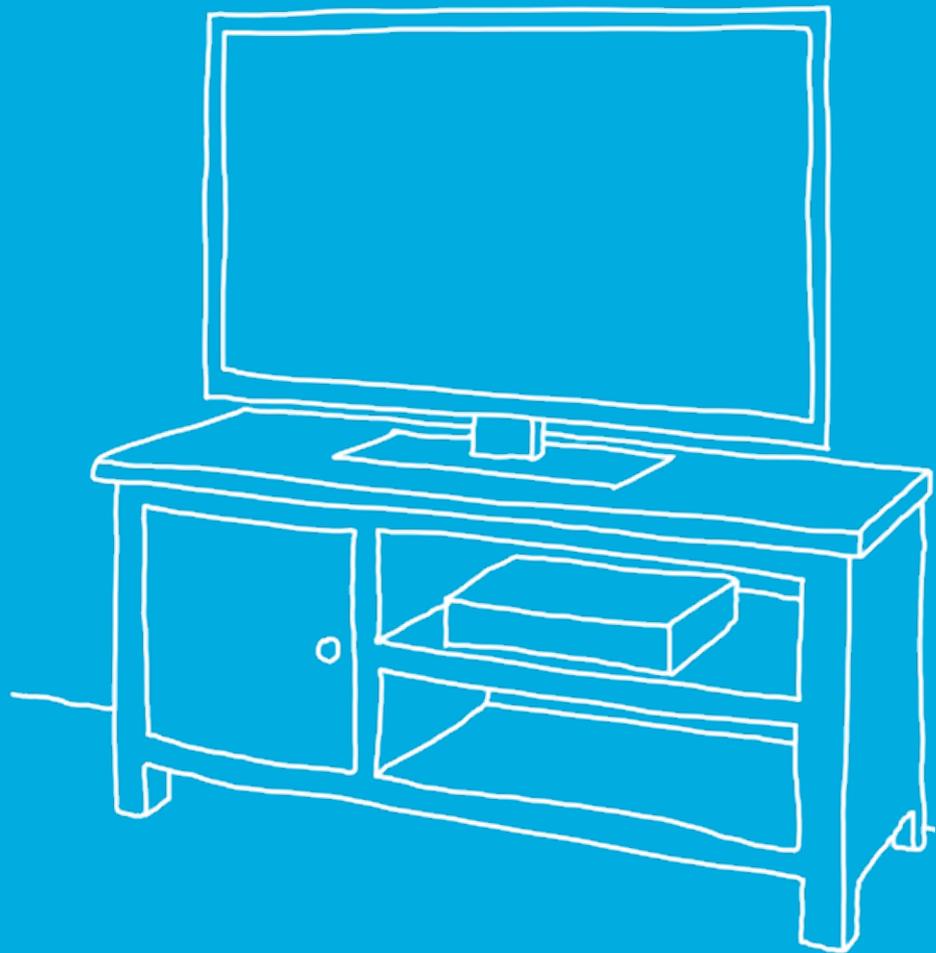


Quakers join the largest anti-Trident march in decades, in London.
Photo: Britain Yearly Meeting

21,270
users were
reached by our
top Facebook
posts

57,653
people visited the
[@britishquakers](#)
Twitter profile

979,000
hits on our
website



BUT! You are still our best route to enquirers!
More people who request info packs from us
do so because they talked to a Quaker
than for any other reason.

Quakers work collaboratively

We are well aware that we can't put the world to rights all by ourselves. We value the important work of others. By engaging with them we are already changing the world. We want to break down barriers; we refuse to prejudge who is or is not an ally.

Scottish Quakers challenge military presence in secondary schools

In 2016 Britain Yearly Meeting worked with Scottish Quakers over their concerns about military presence in secondary schools. Our Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer collaborated with ForcesWatch, an organisation that scrutinises the ethics of armed forces recruitment, to build and submit a petition to the Scottish Parliament. It called on the government to ensure greater scrutiny, guidance and consultation on visits to schools by the military. Together, our representatives met with the Public Petitions Committee, which is now consulting with local authorities. The project has opened up a much-needed public debate on the issue, receiving high-profile press coverage and promoting our Quaker commitment to peace.

David Turner

For a number of years I've visited Scottish schools as part of a group from Campaign Against Arms Trade. In that time I found evidence of ever-increasing visits to these schools by military personnel in uniform. I found they were targeting schools in areas where employment opportunities are few, knowing that young people are vulnerable to the appeal of what the forces seem to offer. At the time I wasn't sure what action to take. I was very concerned, but I didn't really feel I knew what to do.

I then received a Quaker Peace & Social Witness briefing that put military visits to schools in the wider context of government policy. I learnt that such initiatives were being generously funded to gain public support for the military and to boost recruitment. The briefing presented a framework for action for Friends, and it was then that I felt compelled to act. So I put some thoughts together and gave a presentation to our local meeting. It included

a range of possible activities and partners, should Friends accept this as a matter of concern.

I felt a real sense of encouragement to find that my concern was widely shared. Other Friends were interested in finding ways of working with politicians, and it was clear that the way to do that – if it was going to be a Scottish voice – would be to move it up through area meeting to General Meeting for Scotland, where it could be taken forward by Britain Yearly Meeting's Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer.

I've been to meetings at which there were speakers from ForcesWatch, and immediately it felt that we were on the same side. I just felt we were speaking with one voice. I had always hoped this work would produce partners, and I'm very pleased that this has been possible.



Tackling wage inequality

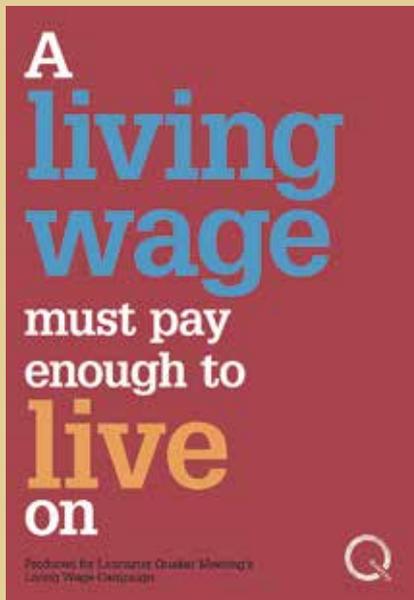
Almost six million people in the UK are paid less than the Living Wage. Lancaster Quakers worked with BYM to oppose this situation, and have successfully campaigned to get employers in their area to improve wages. Thanks to their work, the Co-operative Group has reduced the differential between its highest and lowest paid employees and is now paying the Living

Wage. The campaign has been very well received locally. At vigils and other public actions Lancaster Quakers have met with an overwhelmingly positive response. We will continue to work with them to ensure wages keep up with the rising cost of living.

Housing action hitting home

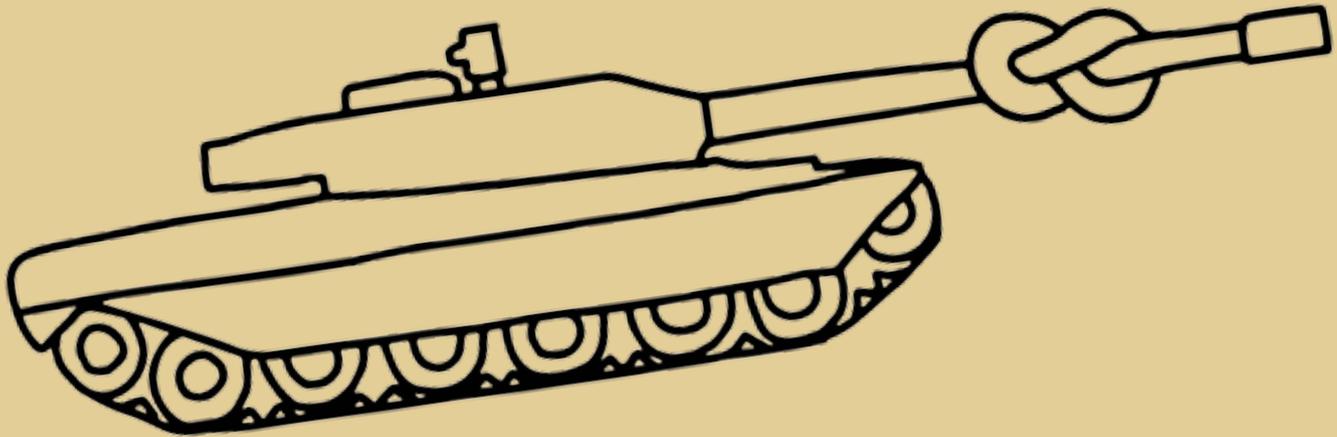
Homelessness is on the increase and it is becoming ever more difficult for people to afford a

home. BYM has responded by joining with Housing Justice, an organisation that supports practical housing projects nationwide, to address these issues. We have funded an intern to focus on two areas: engaging with planning, and developing alternative models for genuinely affordable housing. We want to help Quakers make a real difference to people who are homeless or in housing need. This project will be a model for future partnerships.



Victorian houses, Nottingham. Photo: Natesh Ramasamy / Flickr CC BY 2.0

What we're up against



83% of all state secondary schools in Scotland are visited at least once a year.

The armed forces make more visits to Scottish schools than the emergency services.

31 state secondary schools in Scotland are visited ten or more times per year.

All data relates to the academic years 2010/11 and 2011/12. Provided by ForcesWatch.

2016 financials at a glance



Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Their unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship, where they seek a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly, within themselves and in their relationships with others and the world around them. They meet together for worship in local meetings, which 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 their faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

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