

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS):
GENERAL MEETING FOR SCOTLAND

(Scottish Charity Number SC 012281)

Report for the year ended 31st December 2024

OFFICE BEARERS

During 2024 and at the time of the report:

Michael Hutchinson (Clerk)
Susan Mitchell (Assistant Clerk)
Katrina McCrea (Treasurer)

ADMINISTRATOR AND PRINCIPAL OFFICE

During 2024 and at the time of the report:

Jane Booth
West Haybogs
Tough
Alford AB33 8DU
07747 396456
Email ScotFriends@gmail.com
Website www.quakerscotland.org

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER OF THE ACCOUNTS

Graham Morton
25 Newbattle Abbey Crescent
Dalkeith
EH21 3LN

BANKERS

The Co-operative Bank
Triodos Bank

TRUSTEES

During 2024 and at the time of the report:

Robin Waterston (Clerk)
Katrina McCrea (Treasurer)
Andrew Blackadder
Malcolm Crosby

And from January 2025:

Kevin Franz
Neil Turner

NOTE 1: *This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).*

NOTE 2: *In this report "the General Meeting" means General Meeting for Scotland, "the Society" means the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and "the Yearly Meeting" means the Yearly Meeting of the Society in Britain (Britain Yearly Meeting). "Attendees" are persons who are associated with a Local Meeting for Worship, but who are not in formal membership of the Society.*

1. The Organisation of the General Meeting

The General Meeting is a constituent part of Britain Yearly Meeting which is the governing body of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain. The Membership of the General Meeting consists of those having Membership in the four Scottish Area Meetings of the Society. The Area Meeting is the basic business unit in the Society, dealing with membership, marriages, pastoral care and property. The General Meeting normally meets four times each year in different parts of Scotland enabling participation physically or by video linking.

2. The Objectives of the General Meeting

The General Meeting has national responsibilities on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting to represent and advance the life and witness of Quakers in Scotland. The General Meeting shares the basic aims of the Society as a church, promoting its spiritual insights and looking after the interests and welfare of its members. It provides both a policy-making forum for the Society in Scotland and a focus for the consideration of issues of concern and importance to the Society in Scotland.

The General Meeting represents the Society in Scotland to the other Churches and other faiths, and to the Scottish Government and some other Scottish organisations.

3. Administration

Foundation There is no known founding document. The General Meeting was probably established in the latter part of the 17th century when the Society was first organised, after its beginning as a popular religious movement under the inspiration of George Fox. Its operation is governed by "*Quaker faith & practice*", its Book of Discipline. As described there, General Meeting for Scotland is at all times subject to the discipline of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Governing Document Following changes to charities legislation in Scotland, a Governing Document was approved by the General Meeting on 10th March 2007. Since then, it has had several minor revisions.

Office bearers Those who serve the General Meeting are normally appointed for (renewable) three-year periods. There are three office bearers: Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Treasurer.

Other committees and posts The Nominations Committee brings forward nominations for various posts and the General Meeting makes the appointments. The Parliamentary Engagement Working Group attends to the GM's engagement with political Issues, with the main focus being on providing guidance for the work of the Parliamentary Engagement Officer. The Children and Young People representative coordinates activities involving Children and Young People, and this includes weekends for teenagers and families. In June 2021 a new Scottish Quaker Community Justice Working Group started its work. In September 2023 a group called Quakers in Scotland Coordinating Group (QiSCG) was set up to continue previous work on simplifying the organisation of Quaker activity in Scotland. The group was asked initially to provide information on moving to a single charity and do preparatory work on how the Area Meeting structure might evolve. Further discussions took place in 2024.

Normally six trustees, including the General Meeting treasurer *ex officio*, serve the General Meeting. Trustees receive no remuneration. Trustees serve renewable three-year terms and are appointed by the whole General Meeting upon nomination by the Nominations Committee.

Taking decisions The Society regards its meetings for business as being held under the guidance of God. It believes that, when the meeting takes place in a spirit of worship, God's will for the meeting can be discerned without the need for divisive voting. The Clerk presents each item of business to the meeting and, after Friends have been heard, and when it seems likely that the meeting has reached unity, the Clerk presents a draft Minute. This may be accepted at once or can be amended until those present can unite with it. The Minutes are thus approved by the meeting at which they are made.

4. Financial Review of 2024

The major source of income is contributions from the constituent Area Meetings through a quota system. In addition, a grant of £8000 was received from Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) towards the tasks laid upon GM in Section 5.03 of *Quaker faith & practice*. We transferred £6000 towards the cost of the Parliamentary Engagement Officer post from funds received through Area Meeting contributions.

GM is supported by a part-time Administrative Officer. Jane Booth has been in post since September 2023. The salary is paid from the General Meeting's funds. She undertook the admin tasks required in preparation for the next Book of Members to be published at the start of 2025.

GM does not have a primary role as a grant-making organisation. It exists both to support Quaker initiatives and to facilitate Quaker participation in ecumenical and interfaith activities in Scotland. Our policy is to offer financial support primarily to organisations with which we have some direct involvement via appointed representatives or membership.

Income during the year was £30,520 and expenditure was £24,452 giving a surplus of £6,068. When General Meeting reviewed its reserves policy in 2011, the agreement was that the reserves should be equivalent to not less than 6 months expenditure. GM's overall balance at the end of the year was £49,554, more than the reserve policy requirements. Trustees reviewed the situation in 2023 and as Quakers in Scotland are going through a major structural organisational review, it was agreed that additional funding could be required to support this process so the level of reserve can be justified. However, it was agreed on the recommendation of Trustees that the budgeted quota from AMs for 2025 should be reduced from £16,000 to £12,000, and the contribution to BYM for the PEO post be increased to £6500.

5. Review of Activities during the year

(a) Meetings of General Meeting itself

We held five business meetings during 2024. Regular business items include reports and consideration of a large variety of charitable endeavours within Scotland, especially those with which the General Meeting has a special relationship (for example, through an appointed trustee or other representative). A special additional meeting was held to consider proposals for reorganising our structure.

Most meetings included a focus on one or two topics in more detail. These were: March - reflecting on our work with the Scottish Parliament and MSPs; April – options for simplifying our structures; June – our social witness; September – discerning the merits of the options for reorganising our structure; November – the work of our Community Justice Working Group.

(b) Other meetings of Scottish Friends supported by GM

The very popular residential Families Weekend took place in May in Pitlochry. Younger Friends (11-16) from Scotland participated in the annual Summer Shindig residential event on the Isle of Cumbrae (organised by the Northern Friends Youth Events Trust). A further all-age weekend event at Wiston Lodge was organised in September.

(c) Parliamentary Engagement Work

The Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG) aims to have 8 members from across Scotland, two from each of four Area Meetings. The Group works with the Parliamentary Engagement Officer (PEO), Sarah Komashko. Our aim is to build connections with our elected representatives in Scotland and to foster ongoing conversations with Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and the Scottish Government. The Group's priorities, currently Climate Justice, Economic Justice and Peace Building, are set every three years by General Meeting for Scotland. Priorities for the three years 2026 to 2028 are due to be discerned by General Meeting in November 2025.

Highlights of 2024 for the PEWG were:

- **Climate Justice:** 2024 was a difficult year for climate action, stretching into 2025. The Scottish Government is in difficulties with its Climate Change Plan and Energy Strategy; it has had to reframe the carbon emission reduction pathway leading to Net Zero in 2045. New carbon emission budgets are due to be established in May/June 2025, followed by the next Climate Change Plan in September 2025, the delayed Energy Strategy and Heat in Buildings Bill thereafter. Working with Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS), we encourage Government to accelerate climate policy formulation and implementation, in short to act with urgency. We try to raise awareness in Government and the Parliament of the uncertainties inherent in the new technological solutions being put forward seemingly as the main methods to cut carbon emissions. One example is Carbon Capture and Storage techniques which are unproven at the scale required to make a difference. We advocate for Government to focus on steps to cut emissions more directly through setting a pathway for removing fossil fuels from domestic heating and improving public transport provision to encourage private car use reductions. In March we facilitated an event in the Scottish Parliament setting out the public health benefits arising from action taken to mitigate climate change; for example reducing air pollution in urban areas through traffic reduction measures and low emission zones. The relevant Scottish Government Minister attended and the event generated several follow-up meetings with MSPs. Finally, we continued to encourage the Government to build on its successful Loss and Damage aid programmes specifically designed to get grants directly into the hands of communities suffering from the impact of climate change, for example through storms and/or prolonged drought.
- **Peace Building:** first, following our successful Parliamentary events in September 2023, we continued to facilitate connections between Quaker Peace Education specialists and organisations in Scotland working on conflict resolution and global citizenship education within Scottish schools. Strong links have been built with Scotland's main teaching union and also Education Scotland, the body responsible for reviewing the school curriculum. Secondly, the Group has been in dialogue with Scottish Enterprise and the relevant Government Minister about public funds being allocated to arms manufacturers in Scotland. Government supports defence manufacturing in Scotland whilst having a policy not to grant funds to projects directly developing munitions. The Group advocates against public funding for these companies and, at the very least, for the current human rights checks required for all grants to be significantly strengthened to prevent public funds being linked to the manufacture of components of weapons which end up being involved in breaches of international law during armed conflicts. We also advocate for more stringent plans and action for cutting their carbon emissions to be required of recipients of Scottish Enterprise funding.
- **Land Reform:** the Group facilitated a response from Quakers in Scotland to a consultation on the Land Reform Bill.
- **Time for Reflection:** when the Scottish Parliament is sitting, each week's business is opened on a Tuesday with Time for Reflection. This is an opportunity for a citizen of any faith or none to offer a short reflection to MSPs in the Chamber about their faith, their personal life, or an aspect of life. As in 2023, two Scottish Quakers delivered reflections during the year.

The PEWG is small and aims to work with allies who are pursuing similar goals. Two important examples are SCCS and Christian Aid in the field of Climate Justice. The goal is to influence decision-making and change over time, to shift the social and political sphere bit by bit in the direction of Quaker testimonies of Peace, Equality, Simplicity and Truth & Integrity. Fostering truth and integrity in public life forms the backdrop of the Group's activities. We respond to the political agenda of the day, but the work is long term, guided by our values. We look to see where we can offer a distinctively Quaker voice.

(d) Administrative support

Jane Booth served as administrator for General Meeting throughout the year, being employed for eight hours a week to support the work of office-holders and Scottish Friends generally.

(e) Representation on other bodies

We continued to support representatives on a variety of Scottish bodies including ACTS, Interfaith Scotland, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, Northern Friends Youth Events Trust, the Iona Community Board and others.

6. Future Intentions

Since May 2021, we have had a Local Development Worker in Scotland, Zoe Prosser, employed by Britain Yearly Meeting. She has continued in her role of strengthening our community of Quakers in Scotland throughout the year.

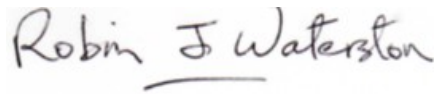
A significant task before GM in 2024 was considering proposals from QISCG on how to simplify our structures, while sustaining our spiritual community and witness on matters of social and political concern. It is expected that the process of implementation will begin in 2025.

7. Connected Bodies and Transactions between them

Apart from the constituent Quaker Meetings and Britain Yearly Meeting, there is no other connected body.

8. Approval of Report and authority to Sign

This Report was approved by the trustees in May 2025; it was signed on their behalf by Robin Waterston, Clerk to the Trustees:

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Robin J Waterston". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Robin Waterston