

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)
SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND AREA MEETING

SCOTTISH CHARITY NUMBER: SC019165

REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020

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Trustees' Report

This is the Annual Report for South East Scotland Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) for the year ended 31st December 2020.

INTRODUCTION

Eleven local groups (including two worshipping groups) of varying sizes meet for regular sessions of Quaker worship within South East Scotland. They also work together as an Area Meeting, responsible for Quaker witness in the area and for the general support of members of the Quaker communities, whether they are in formal membership of the Society of Friends or not. Two meeting houses (in Kelso and in the centre of Edinburgh) act as focal points not only for Quakers but for the wider community, their rooms and facilities being made available for community groups. Both worship and work are overseen by the whole community of Friends through Area Meetings for Church Affairs, at which the process of decision-making is guided by the Spirit.

This report gives some insight into Quaker activities in South East Scotland during 2020, including the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. It highlights the main concerns of the meetings and work that is undertaken to facilitate their running. Financially the Society is largely dependent on the voluntary donations of its members and attenders and their great generosity is warmly recognised.

We were able to make the Society's rooms available for the use of others until the middle of March and we hope they found a peaceful haven in which they could pursue the purpose that brought them to us. Unfortunately, both meeting houses were closed to public use for the rest of the year, as well as for almost all Quaker use.

PURPOSES AND ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVES

The charitable object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the area of South East Scotland and beyond, as laid down in *Quaker Faith & Practice*. The Area Meeting furthers the religious beliefs of its members, provides places where Quaker Meetings for Worship can be held within South East Scotland, maintains Quaker witness within this area and supports charitable objectives that give witness to Quaker testimonies.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

The Area Meeting is the over arching entity supporting Quaker worship and witness within South East Scotland. Quaker Meetings for Worship are open to the public and, until closure in mid March, were held at:

- Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House (several meetings on Sundays and weekdays)
- Kelso Quaker Meeting House (on Sundays)
- South Edinburgh and Polmont (each Sunday)

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- Dunbar and Kirkcaldy (twice each month)
- Peebles and Portobello/Musselburgh (three times each month)
- Penicuik and North Edinburgh (monthly).

Following the preparation of risk assessments, which were approved by trustees, some meetings were able to reopen for Meetings for Worship towards the end of the year before closing again in December. Quaker worship moved online, for both public Meetings for Worship on Sundays and, at other times, for Quaker business meetings. While there was some experimentation with 'blended' meetings (with some participants being present in person, but most attending online) there was little opportunity for this during 2020. Plans are being made to improve the audio-visual facilities in the Edinburgh Meeting House during 2021 to improve the quality of blended meetings both for Quakers and for others.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Meetings for Church Affairs (business meetings of the Area Meeting) were held on six occasions during 2020, all but the first held online using "Zoom". All members of the Religious Society of Friends as well as others who attend our Meetings for Worship are welcome to attend these meetings, at which subjects of general interest are explored, reports covering a variety of Quaker concerns are received, and decisions are made concerning the use of our various resources.

Despite the restrictions caused by Covid-19, the main concerns of the Area Meeting during 2020 have been focussed on similar matters to earlier years.

- The year saw further development of our concerns about the effects of climate change, with consideration both of the planetary effects and the impact that this must make on our own lifestyles. The Area Meeting added our name to the 'Global Investment Statement to Governments on Climate Change' which calls on all governments to implement the actions required by the Paris Agreement of 2019 as a matter of utmost urgency. More locally, the Area Meeting is continuing to encourage the UK and Scottish governments to be as ambitious as possible in tackling the climate and ecological emergency. We have also explored ways in which we might further green our meeting houses.
- In relation to peace work, we have made a financial contribution to the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) to support its work in Scotland. We await with interest an update on plans for the Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre's project to erect a memorial in Princes Street Gardens to commemorate the courage and steadfastness of conscientious objectors during the two world wars, to which we have contributed in the past.

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- Along with the other three Area Meetings in Scotland, we have continued our involvement with and our support for the Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer, employed jointly by General Meeting for Scotland and Britain Yearly Meeting. After the new PEO started in October 2020 following a delayed recruitment process, his work focussed on the Scottish commitments to reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels and the need for a just and green recovery from the Covid-19 emergency.
- In relation to societal issues, we have continued to provide funds to support remand prisoners in maintaining contact with their families while they are held in prison. We have striven to educate ourselves about Black Lives Matter and show support for anti-racism wherever possible, posting concerns on our website and hosting one of the displays of the Black Lives Matter Mural Trail on the railings outside Edinburgh Meeting House. We have also been considering how we might embrace greater diversity and inclusiveness within our own meetings.
- The Area Meeting hosted a residential meeting of the Quaker Centres Gathering in January 2020. This is a periodic meeting of representatives from all the large Quaker Centres within Britain Yearly Meeting. Items of mutual interest were discussed concerning the running of Quaker buildings that are regularly let out for public meetings or for residential events.

Local meetings support these initiatives through their own Meetings for Learning and study groups, including collecting funds and supporting new themes that are brought before the wider membership. Many have interacted regularly with their local MPs and MSPs. The strengthening of ties between members of different meetings has been fostered through the meetings of all Scottish Friends organised by General Meeting for Scotland (four meetings each year) and the online Britain Yearly Meeting, held for members of the Society of Friends from the whole of Britain.

OUTREACH AT THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

It was not possible to use the Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh as "Venue 40" during the Edinburgh International Festival Fringe in August 2020. However, the Meeting House did take part in the 'FringeMakers' crowdfunding platform initiated by the Festival Fringe, raising money for the provision of new drapes for the theatre space.

OUR MEETING HOUSES

The Area Meeting's two meeting houses (located in the Edinburgh Old Town and in Kelso) are normally hired out to community groups and to voluntary organisations when they are not being used for Quaker activities. Each meeting house is seen not only as a base for the activities of the Society of Friends but also as a resource for the local community.

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During the enforced closure of both meeting houses, the opportunity has been taken to carry out some repair and maintenance, although major planned repair work could not take place in 2020 because of the restrictions placed on contractors.

MEETING HOUSE STAFF

The Area Meeting employs a number of staff to manage the Edinburgh meeting house. Almost all staff work supporting Quaker worship and other activities in Edinburgh is carried out in the Meeting House and little can be done at home, although the joint managers maintained an onsite presence and were able to carry out necessary office work during 2020. The management staff were both willing and able to undertake work outwith their normal job description in order to respond to the rapidly changing situation. It was an Area Meeting priority to continue to pay salaried and, as far as possible, casual staff and an expanded management committee was set up to monitor this and report to trustees.

SUSTAINABILITY

For many years members of the Society of Friends have upheld a commitment to reducing global warming and mitigating climate change (this is known as the "Canterbury Commitment" following a decision taken at a Yearly Meeting held in Canterbury in 2011). Britain Yearly Meeting has asked Area Meetings to include an annual statement about activities and progress towards becoming low carbon communities. Apart from trying to influence the lifestyles of all who worship in Quaker Meetings it is clear that a major task is to try to increase the energy efficiency of each of our two meeting houses. Our architect undertook detailed quinquennial surveys of each meeting house at the end of 2019 and made specific recommendations about improving energy efficiency through installing better wall insulation and more double glazing (in both meeting houses). Work on this and the need to upgrade their heating systems and ventilation has been delayed because of the pandemic.

DONATIONS AND GRANTS

The voluntary contributions of those who attend our Meetings for Worship help to support the upkeep and development of the two meeting houses, as well as supporting the Meeting's charitable activities. The Area Meeting itself provides funds:

- for the work of the Religious Society of Friends within Britain and abroad (as funded through Britain Yearly Meeting);
- to General Meeting for Scotland as support for Scottish ecumenical and interfaith initiatives;
- for the support of the Scottish Parliamentary Liaison Officer (funded through General Meeting for Scotland and Britain Yearly Meeting);
- to its members and others to attend Quaker meetings and conferences;
- to support charitable work undertaken by its own members and for other charities undertaking work supported by the membership.

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The Area Meeting has been the fortunate recipient of a legacy established as the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust. This makes grants to *"deserving persons resident in Scotland who owing to straitened circumstances are unable to enjoy the usual pleasures of life, the purpose of such grants being to provide the recipients with some additional comfort or pleasure of an exceptional nature over and above the usual necessities of life."* Since the Trust was established in 2002 more than 150 grants have been distributed to Quakers and non-Quakers from all over Scotland to enable them to experience some aspect of enjoyment in their lives. Reports on grants made by the trust are published regularly in *Scottish Friend*, the newsletter of General Meeting for Scotland, and the Area Meeting's own newsletter, *SESAME*.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The results for the year and the charity's financial position at the end of the year are shown in the attached financial statements.

OVERVIEW OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

The pandemic affected both income and expenditure in 2020. On the income side, there was a substantial decrease because both meeting houses had to close for bookings in March in order to comply with Scottish Government regulations. We were, however, able to take advantage of the Business Support Fund to offset some of these losses. There was a drop in Members' donations to the Area Meeting and direct to Local Meetings. A legacy was received by one of our Local Meetings.

There were some savings as a result of the lack of public use of the rooms in the meeting houses (trading activity) and there being no costs associated with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The Area Meeting continued to employ its staff, putting them on full or flexible furlough as necessary and taking advantage of the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

The net financial result before other recognised gains was a deficit of £31,112 as compared to a deficit of £27,833 in 2019. The overall result in 2020, after accounting for investment gains, is a loss of £10,662 whereas a surplus of £8,957 was reported in 2019. Overall, such fluctuations are within normal ranges but in 2020 the outcome was achieved by taking the difficult decision to reduce the Area Meeting's total contribution to the work of Britain Yearly Meeting as compared with 2018 and 2019, and because of the unplanned deferral of some major capital work.

