



Central England
Quakers

Central England Quakers in 2019

A summary of the Annual Report and Accounts





Welcome

In 2019 there are 733 members, attenders and children in Central England Area Quaker Meeting who meet regularly in one of our 16 local Quaker meetings to worship.

As we sit together in silence we are drawn into the presence of the Spirit. Each person in the meeting is responsible for holding the worship through their openness to the community. No one Friend is appointed to lead, anyone can respond to the promptings of the Spirit. Quakers have worshipped in this manner for more than 370 years.

It is from this still and quiet centre that we live our lives following the leadings of the Spirit. We are guided by our history and the lives of many Friends who are witnesses to our testimonies to peace, truth, simplicity, equality and sustainability. We continue this calling through our service in our world today.

In this Annual Review you will catch a glimpse of what has happened in the local meetings, the branches – Peacemakers, the Peace Hub and the various committees in 2019. The full report is available from the area meeting office.

CEQ area meeting is the administrative body and extends from Stourbridge in the west to Hartshill in the east; Sutton Coldfield in the north and Warwick to the south. Membership of the Society is held by the area meeting and it supports the Friends in local meetings as we work together to grow in the spirit and witness to the wider world. Each local meeting has its own life and Friends are involved in their local communities in many different ways.

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■ RIGHT Friends enjoy an outing to Baddesley Clinton.





TOP . Children's meeting in the park, they've all gone off to hide. Can I find them?

ABOVE Stourbridge meetings' great get together having fun with a parachute.

RIGHT Hall Green meeting house spruced up with a fresh coat of paint.



Local Meetings (LMs)

Our worship and spiritual development

Regular meetings for worship are central to the Quaker community and elders are appointed to support them. They are held every Sunday by each local meeting with some during the week as well. Overseers work alongside the elders and they have the special responsibility for the care of the Friends in the meeting. The pastoral role of the overseer is one of the ways the sense of community is strengthened.

Our aim is to create a sustainable community where everyone is accepted and getting to know a smaller group of Friends at a deeper level helps to build this. This is supported by a variety of activities - study groups on various topics to help Friends to spend time together talking about their faith, spiritual journey groups or regular shared lunches after meeting for worship give Friends time to talk to each other about their own experience of growing in the Spirit.

However sustaining Quaker communities in local areas can be a challenge as the size of some of our congregations dwindles. This has prompted the area meeting to set up a review that will report back in 2020.

Maintaining low carbon and sustainable premises

As well as nurturing their own communities, Friends are engaged with the wider world and continue to act on their testimony to sustainability. At a gathering for local meeting premises representatives, the topic for the opening talk was **Sustainability, environmental surveys and the Eco Church accreditation**.

Each of the thirteen meeting houses has their own specific requirements to reduce carbon use. This has led to a variety of initiatives ranging from improved insulation and heating systems to the redevelopment of meeting house gardens. Major projects have been planned at Coventry, Selly Oak and Bull Street meeting houses but there are also smaller ones such as making a bench from a fallen branch and new compost bins from reclaimed pallets at Stourbridge or a wildlife garden at Hall Green. Cotteridge meeting received the gold award from Eco Church in 2019 whilst Hall Green and Stourbridge meetings achieved the silver and bronze awards respectively.

Hartshill meeting's allotment continues to provide fruit and vegetables and many meeting houses have gardens which provide a relaxing and peaceful place for quiet reflection.

Working for policy and system change

Joining with other Birmingham faith communities area meeting signed a letter in support of Birmingham City Council declaring a Climate Emergency. This was accepted by the City Council, and Friends are working both in the city and around the West Midlands to tackle climate change. The declaration recognised that social justice, inequality, natural environmental and health issues are all involved. The challenge for local meetings now is turning words into action.

The Low Carbon Commitment Forum attracts Friends from many local meetings who meet regularly to share their experience of developing sustainable ways of life. Along with other faith groups, they organised an ecumenical environmental conference **No Planet B: Acting out Faith in the World** in July and over 100 people attended.

Peace and Justice

Most local meetings are active in supporting our work on peace and justice. Giving money, volunteering and providing moral and practical support all occur in a range of ways. Local meetings support Quaker-led projects in the Gambia, Palestine, Uganda, Ghana as well as supporting asylum seekers and refugees in the UK in a variety of ways. Engaging with politicians, writing letters to their MPs, attending public meetings or joining protests are a few of the ways Friends seek to change policy and change systems. Local meetings began their support for Jai Jagat 2020 to highlight an international concern for Climate Emergency and the impact on poorer countries.

Friends were involved in Roots of Resistance No Faith in War day of action. This was a Quaker presence at the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair. Friends from Bull Street, Coventry, Stourbridge, Cotteridge and Solihull local meetings supported other Quakers either to go to London to the day of action or hold a meeting locally to witness for Peace in the world. Friends in Coventry meeting made a tapestry of mini-banners illustrating our Quaker commitment to peace.

Quaker Work and Witness

Peacemakers

The work of Peacemakers in promoting peaceful ways of living together continues. A Home Office funded project **Minus Violence Plus Peace** addressed the challenge of increasing knife crime. It revealed a rich potential for peace education to work with 'at risk' young people and the adults in their lives. It looked at what underlies violence and at a peace-building response in the community, within schools, families and individuals.

Positive Peace courses are offered to vulnerable women in the Anawim Project and are hugely successful. The women taking part in the workshops feel valued and empowered.

Taking a restorative approach when dealing with conflict works for all the parties involved, hearing the different stories, exploring thoughts and feelings and finding mutually agreed solutions. It offers an alternative way to address discipline and behavioural issues and provides a consistent framework for responding to these issues.

Low Carbon Commitment Forum

At the Low Carbon Commitment Forum Friends from local meetings share their progress towards becoming a low carbon community and develop ways of working with others who share our concerns for the future. As well as working ecumenically in organizing conferences, the Forum supports individual Friends who are led by the Spirit to be involved in direct climate action.

In Birmingham city centre and in Leamington, Quakers gathered to support the Young People 4 Climate strike. Those in Birmingham held a meeting for worship

The area meeting was a signatory to a letter from the Birmingham faith communities and leaders supporting the Declaration of a Climate Emergency in Birmingham. This was followed by a report – **Birmingham Climate Emergency – the Role for Faith Communities**. It has become part of the City's work to achieve a just transition to a net zero carbon city. A Quaker is now also the faith representative on the city's Climate Emergency task force.

Children and Young People's Committee

The CYPC supports young people in exploring their spirituality, giving them space and opportunity to build relationships with each other and with the adult Friends who lead and facilitate events. In this setting they are enabled to find out about Quakerism and other Quakers, to question, explore and to enjoy being together.

In 2019 there were three events: kayaking on the river Leam at Leamington Spa (with plenty of cake too): a family day of Forest School activity with added Worship -in – the - Forest: a sleepover at Warwick Meeting House.

A young people's group meets each month and is popular for young Quakers from four of the local meetings. They can meet, chat and explore issues affecting them. Our older teenagers attended two national events: Junior Yearly Meeting and the Meeting for Sufferings' Young People's Participation Day at Friends House.

Central England Asylum Group

The group met three times during the year. On one occasion Friends from local meetings shared what activities they were running to support asylum seekers and refugees. Some Friends wrote to their MPs about their concern about indefinite detention and forwarded the replies they received. However, the group is aware that engagement in the political aspects of this concern which has been its focus may have been neglected.

Consequently in December the group prepared a short document for meetings suggesting four or five issues to raise with candidates at hustings, prior to the general election. Two members wrote the recent QARN (Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network) report about extortionate renewal fees charged by the Home Office and this has circulated widely throughout the area meeting.

This is a small but active group who are involved nationally with QARN and the CTBI (Churches together in Birmingham) Detention Forum and the Churches' Refugee Network. »



ABOVE Feet.



RIGHT Junior Peacemakers making connections.

BELOW Letter from faith communities supporting the declaration of a climate emergency by the city.





■ ABOVE Walking with Hope. Following the Nene way to raise awareness and money to support the Hope Projects.

■ LEFT Eco Church Gold Award plaque.

■ BELOW Meeting for Worship at the DSEI event in London in September.



Quaker Work and Witness *continued*

Peace Committee

- » Members joined demonstrations against the Defence Procurement and Exportability Fair in Birmingham resulting in its removal to Farnborough. In September, Friends took part in demonstrations opposing the use and sale of armaments at the Defence and Security Equipment International Fair in London. Stourbridge Friends and others made banners to be used in support of the protest.

The national bike ride for Freedom from Torture visited Birmingham in July and Friends helped host participants. Furthermore the committee donated £1,000 to support a choral work commissioned by the Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture.

The Committee has a Quaker representative on the Board of Friends House Moscow and has made a donation. In July they supported an event organised by Church Action for Tax Justice. They received a report on the seventieth anniversary celebration of Church and Peace in Berlin.

Chaplaincy

A quiet but valuable part of Quaker witness is chaplaincy work bringing a regular and reliable presence into a variety of workplaces. Quaker chaplains join ecumenical and multi-faith teams gaining and contributing to a deeper understanding of many diverse communities.

Friends serve in three prisons: HMP Hewell, HMP Oakwood in Staffordshire and HMP Birmingham. Others visit patients in the hospitals including the high security wards in the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust. Interaction with patients includes sessions of mindfulness meditation.

Friends serve as chaplains at Birmingham and Warwick universities holding meetings for worship and providing a listening ear. One is a chaplain with the West Midlands police. CEQ supports Industrial and Retail Chaplaincies throughout the area including Coventry and Warwick Industrial Chaplaincy, the Birmingham Retail Chaplaincy and the Black Country Industrial Chaplaincy, much needed work in a time of insecure employment and an unstable economy. The Community Justice Group supports and upholds them.

Peace Hub

The new opening hours helped to bring in more visitors to connect with our Peace and Justice themes. **Safe and Sound** explored the idea of sustainable security. This drew together many of the themes we have explored in the past to reconsider what makes us 'safe'. This theme also formed the basis of a peace conference, marking five years since the Hub opened.

Participants explored how we can rethink security for a more just and peaceful world. Initiatives highlighted positive work happening in the UK and abroad, from ethical investment funds to protecting the Bedouin Lived Cultural Heritage Project. Participants pledged to act and make changes in their lives and outlook.

Joint events to help people become more active for peace were organized including Junior Peacemakers' workshops. They involved over twenty schools, and helped children make connections between global peace and justice issues and their local school environment.

Quaker Christmas Parcels

There are six members of this committee that annually arrange this hugely successful scheme, which has been running for over half a century. A total of £17,000 was raised in 2019, with over 23,000 food items purchased – a record amount. Many volunteers, young and old, assist the committee to pack the food items into parcels to be delivered to those in need in the week before Christmas.

Those known by a probation officer to be suffering extreme hardship, in West Midlands, West Mercia and part of Derbyshire, received a total of 941 parcels. In addition, Quakers delivered food parcels and extra trays of groceries to organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees.

The committee received some very moving feedback expressing how much the unexpected gift is appreciated at a time of year when isolation and poverty can be particularly acute.

Governance

The Governing Document defines the way the charity is organised and managed. Local meetings, committees and projects, known as branches, are constituent parts of the charity under the care of trustees.

Trustees are appointed by the area meeting to ensure that the charity is managed in a prudent and legal manner. There were fourteen trustees in 2019 including a clerk, treasurer and assistant clerk and they can serve for up to two triennia.

They are responsible for producing the financial statements incorporating all the transactions of the area meeting and reporting to the Charity Commission each year. They met five times during the year for business and held one training day.

Much of the work of CEQ trustees is carried out by five service committees dealing with finance, property, employment, records and governance and compliance. Trustees are responsible for developing and maintaining a range of policies for the charity. These include ethical investment and banking, financial reserves, employment, health and safety, safeguarding and data protection.

Over 23 full or part-time staff are employed by CEQ. They are wardens, caretakers, administration support staff and gardeners and others work for the branches and the Priory Rooms.

All significant policy decisions on the affairs of the area meeting are taken by the members of the area meeting in the meeting for worship for business. The Quaker business method involves waiting in stillness and considering each matter prayerfully before recording, in the form of a minute, the decision on which the meeting has united.

Meetings for business at area meeting level are conducted by the co-clerks. All members are able to attend and in 2019 area meeting met nine times. Local meetings for business and committee meetings are conducted by their clerks in the same way.

Financial Accounts

Full audited accounts are produced annually, approved by trustees and made available to members of the area meeting. Copies may be obtained from the CEQ Area Office.

They are also lodged with the Charity Commission and can be viewed or downloaded from the Charity Commission website: www.charitycommission.gov.uk (select *Find a Charity*, search for charity no. 224571, then select *View accounts*).

The accounts show figures for both the Charity and Group. The Group figures include, where applicable, the affairs of Priory Rooms (Bull Street) Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary. Inter group balances have been eliminated on consolidation. Fixed assets include financial investments and a number of investment properties. These properties are valued on an open market basis and generate income that helps to fund CEQ's charitable activities. Quaker meeting houses are not valued for accounts purposes.

Statement of Financial Activities 2019

In summary the 2019 accounts show:

	Charity	Group
	£	£
Income:		
Voluntary income (eg. donations, grants, legacies)	283,478	283,478
Charitable activities	238,384	238,384
Other trading activities	126,000	715,657
Investment income	304,960	310,816
Other income	15,583	15,583
Total Income	968,405	1,563,918
Expenditure:		
Cost of raising funds	(23,516)	(587,647)
Charitable activities	(960,097)	(983,814)
Total Expenditure	(983,613)	(1,571,461)
Net gains / losses on investments	387,357	409,284
Net Movement in funds	372,149	401,741
Total funds brought forward	8,677,296	8,991,917
Total funds carried forward	9,049,445	9,393,658
Balance Sheet		
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Fixed assets		
<i>Tangible assets</i>	1,549,239	1,612,342
<i>Investments</i>	6,507,696	6,656,910
Current assets		
<i>Debtors</i>	43,109	139,661
<i>Cash at bank and in hand</i>	1,022,014	1,147,469
Creditors	(72,613)	(152,143)
Provisions	—	(10,581)
Net assets	9,049,445	9,393,658
Total Funds		
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Unrestricted	6,285,975	6,630,188
Restricted	1,072,488	1,072,488
Designated	1,690,982	1,690,982
	9,049,445	9,393,658

**Priory Rooms (Bull Street) Ltd – a trading company,
 wholly owned by the area meeting.**

It provides meeting spaces for a wide range of Quaker and other groups and at the same time offering a high standard of conference facilities to the professional and business communities and continuing to serve as a base for Quaker witness. All profits after provision for future investment needs are gifted to the area meeting to support Quaker work.

A board of directors consisting of Friends nominated through area meeting (including four trustees at present) supervises the management of the company and guides the staff in the Quaker principles that underpin our commercial strategy. During 2019 we have reviewed the management agreement with CEQ trustees, and transferred our investment portfolio to Rathbone Greenbank, a specialist ethical investment manager.

Our customers include a wide range of organisations with a large proportion accounted for by the charitable and educational sectors, as well as businesses of all kinds, training organisations, church groups and amateur choirs. The list of our customers includes universities, charities, professional associations, local government, national



government departments and agencies, choirs and a multitude of small community clubs and support groups, vital in a thriving society. In addition, we provide and service meeting facilities for area meeting and its committees. Our hospitality business includes refreshments and fully catered buffet meals, as well as comfortable meeting spaces.

2019 was another record year, with sales over £720,000 and a trading profit of over £130,000. Our staff are to be congratulated on such an achievement, which has enabled us to donate £120,000 to Central England Quakers. Over the past eleven years, the company has made gifts and loan repayments of over £800,000; this has done much to support the work and witness of Quakers in the region.

It would be remiss not to mention the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the business during the current year. In March 2020 we were obliged to cease operations, and at the time of writing have not been able to reopen. We have retained our staff team and made preparations for starting up again when we are allowed. It remains our aim to continue our tradition of service to the community that has been our hallmark for over 150 years.

Trading Results 2019

Total income	£721,557
Costs	£567,065
Gift to CEQ	£120,000
Retained for future investment	£29,592

LEFT An oasis of calm in the city.

Contact Us

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The Central England Area Quaker Meeting Charities, registered charity number 224571.

