



‘Triennial’ Report for Evesham Local Meeting

COVERING YEARS 2019 – 2022

Written October 2023 by Members and Attenders of Evesham LM

The troubled years of 2020, 2021 and 2022 have had considerable impact on Evesham Local Meeting, as they have had on every Quaker Meeting, every organisation and every family in the country if not the world. The advent of Covid, lockdowns and ill-health, the resultant financial implications and emotional aftermaths have taken their toll on most of us. Evesham Local Meeting survives, and the messages are mixed. This is a compilation of contributions from our Members and Attenders covering the years January 2018 until December 2022.

Pastoral Care

There have been many profound changes affecting Friends in our meeting during the last four years.

Covid started in January 2020 which significantly affected the way Meeting functioned. We used Zoom to maintain contact generally and met in small groups when appropriate. Wherever possible pastoral care was maintained on an individual basis up until January 2022 when government rules were relaxed.

One example that brings back memories was seeing Muriel Greensmith whenever possible when I would sit in the garden and we would converse through the open conservatory door which allowed Muriel to chatter away! It was cold in the winter to be perched on a stool outside.

Loneliness and isolation plus the fear of the unknown played a huge part in many people's lives at this time.

During the Covid period, too, the meeting house cottages underwent major building works and changes which resulted in some disruption to the use of meeting by Friends and hirers.

Since Covid we have been delighted to welcome new faces into our meeting. Rosie Tombs and Callum Smythe have settled into their new home in Evesham. They had a Quaker wedding in July 2023 at Broad Campden Meeting House. Several of us were able to share this joyous occasion with them. In 2019 James Girdwood returned to Evesham Meeting. We appreciate his ministry. We have also welcomed (Lisa) now Jayne Gray, Peter Knight and Linda Harvey.

We have had quite a number of visitors, some of whom have returned several times, including the family of a deceased Friend.

We have continued to have regular contact with all housebound Friends. Two Friends are in supported living accommodation in town and manage only occasional visits to Meeting, however they enjoy sharing a quiet period together on Sunday mornings if unable to attend Meeting. We hold them in the 'light' and they will let us know when we can have a small meeting for worship in their home.

As one ages the sheer mental effort of 'getting out' can be as much of a problem as the physical difficulties. Friends, too, don't always find Zoom acceptable for worship, it isn't for everyone.

Sadly, another Friend has dementia and lives in a nursing home in a local village. She still has a great sense of humour and a loving and caring son.

One dear Friend and her husband moved to supported housing in Cheltenham. She is now suffering from dementia and is such that she needs full time care. They join us sometimes for

shared breakfasts and lunches and enjoy visiting us at home. It highlights the importance to recognise that the full- time carer needs support and time for themselves.

Sadly, we do not have any regular children in meeting currently. We have occasional visiting grandchildren and local refugee children. Our new garden room is a lovely welcoming space for any young visitors.

Oversight involves considering the needs of the meeting as a whole. A pastoral carer needs to know all Friends within the meeting and some who no longer attend due to frailty. Individuals may have emotional, mental and spiritual needs. They may be lonely and have lost loved ones. Absent Friends enjoy phone calls, cards, visits and sometimes the opportunities to be taken out.

The Covid period has left some Friends with anxiety and health issues. How can these be addressed? Sharing worship often helps. Pastoral care requires being able to listen and observe, and to then reflect on how to best help with a situation that becomes evident.

We all need to be pastoral carers for each other and to reach out to our wider communities with a sense of responsibility, humility and love.

Margaret Baldelli



Membership

Attendance on Sunday morning MFW varies between three and twelve. We are encouraging Friends to feel part of our larger community by attending Area Meetings.

During this triennium many Friends have moved away,

Sarah and David Lane moved and transferred to Adel Meeting near Leeds

Stuart Potter and his wife Jayne emigrated to New Zealand where Stuart was born

Simon has transferred to another meeting

Anne Wood moved and transferred to Kingston on Thames meeting

Linda Harvey moved to Colwell, Malvern and communicates regularly by Zoom

Iona Brown moved to Ely in 2022

Lizzie Gilbert moved to Suffolk to care for her mother

Ruth Owen downsized and now lives in Worcester but we are delighted that she is still very much a part of our meeting

Sadly, we have lost six Friends over the period of this report: -

Dorothy Pearson and Guy Oprey in 2019

Joan Emney and Marie Mingana in 2020

Muriel Greensmith and Jean Taylor in 2021

We miss them all.

Margaret Baldelli



Events and Outreach

Evesham Quaker Meeting has been involved with Evesham Vale Welcomes Refugees for some years. We held a combined Film Night about the Refugee situation at Calais where funds were raised. There was also a fundraising Garden Party. We held a vigil of solidarity with refugees in Refugee Week, where 25 people from various organisations joined our Meeting and enjoyed tea and cake.

In Quaker Week, we held a simple supper of soup and fruit, where we had talks from various Members about being a Prison Chaplain, being a Green Councilor and our work with Refugees.

Porridge Smiles Breakfasts have been held, where we have raised funds for Mary's Meals, an organisation which serves life-changing meals at schools to children living in some of the world's poorest countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

We invited members of the Freedom Day Centre, a centre for Adults with Learning Disabilities, to coming to our Meeting House to enjoy a day of activities and refreshments with members and attenders, and this was reciprocated with an invitation for a fabulous lunch back at their centre.

We have been involved with Evesham Churches Together and arranged for a Quaker Meeting in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

We have hosted an Area Meeting Funday where there were history activities (loaned by the Almonry Museum), a heritage walk, and a talk by Barrie Baldelli about the Evesham Abbey Trust. There were various discussions and a musical event with the day ending with tea and cake.

Paul Heskett, our resident Warden, held a musical evening, where fractal patterns and slides were shown and Paul improvised using a synthesiser and various musical instruments. Visitors to the event contributed to a charity donation.

On Sunday 16th October 2022 Evesham Friends hosted a Safeguarding Awareness Training session of children and young people. We were given a PowerPoint presentation by Fiona Lovecy. The talk was illustrated with various scenarios and attention was drawn to the fact that many places of worship have had their own safeguarding issues. A helpful evaluation and feedback followed. We had a good attendance with three local meetings taking part.

Julie Harris

Finances

Evesham Local Meeting Friends and Attenders have always been very generous with their contributions to our finances – aided maybe by an annual reminder from the LM Treasurer. However, several supportive Friends moved away or we have lost them during the period of this report, the economic climate which has resulted from the pandemic and a great reduction of hirers for various reasons (they too have their financial difficulties) has caused a great reduction in our regular income.

We have all become used to using plastic cards in place of cash and many Friends do not carry coins or notes to contribute to our donations box or special collections.

Despite the above, we have remained in balance overall.

Evesham LM was fortunate to be left a Legacy by a much-loved Member of the Meeting and we have been able to purchase a Garden Room to replace the 'Children's Room' which was incorporated into one of the new apartments in Number 28 Cowl Street. We also were able to replace the wood-block floor which was lifting due to a mixture of damp, age and failure of the bonding. This had been put down personally by Friends in the 1980s. There is a small amount of this legacy remaining and we have resolved to spend this on the Peace Garden in the employment of a gardener and resources to continue stocking it. Our previous gardeners were Members of the Meeting and we lost them due to a house move in 2022 nearer their children and grandchildren.

From 2018 until March 2020 when the pandemic began, we continued to make special charitable collections each month, and indeed for the beginning of lockdown these continued. This proved to be impracticable and we agreed to donate to our own charities on an individual basis. This has continued for reasons stated above.

Utility bills are now paid by direct debits and apart from a little difficulty with the water supplier, appear to be smooth but expensive. Broadband has been supplied to the Meeting House to enable zoom for blended meetings and for the use of our hirers.

Ruth Owen

Properties

The Quinquennial survey in 2017 identified many items which we were unable to address before 2020 and the advent of Covid 19. The new survey in 2022 indicates more and deteriorating condition of the Meeting House. Much has been spent on the cottages to bring them up to a legal and comfortable standard for them to be occupied. 29 Cowl Street is occupied by our warden and the two apartments in No. 28 are now contributing to the Area Meeting income.

The roof, windows, walls and decoration of Evesham Meeting House will require much renovation in the next few years. Water ingress from the adjacent car park under the care of Wychavon District Council has complicated the start of work and we await tenders, an appointed builder and for work to begin.

We feel privileged to have our town centre Meeting House and are working on ways to make it more attractive and available to the people of Evesham. In the meantime, we are smaller in number than at any time in the last several decades, in common with other places of worship, clubs and organisations. We have difficulty in filling all the recognised roles but with combining roles, wearing several hats and working together, our teamwork will enable us to flourish despite the difficulties which are evident today.

Ruth Owen



Work with Churches Together in Evesham and District

Evesham Friends Meeting has a representative on Churches Together in Evesham and District (CTED).

During the period of the report the Meeting has hosted a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity session during 2019. Also, during 2019, the Chair of CTED visited the Meeting during Quaker Week and joined us for supper.

In 2021 work began on reviewing the constitution of CTED. The work was completed with a new constitution being signed by most member churches of the organisation. Although Evesham Meeting did not sign the document, we did contribute towards it.

The new constitution has spawned a booklet, 'Stronger Together', followed by a series of Lent talks. One of the talks was given by our representative and was well received. We continue to work with CTED.

Julie Tucker

Eldership and Discussion Group

We have one Elder at Evesham Meeting.

No specific issues particular to the role of the Elder have occurred during this Triennial period.

One of the main ways that the Elder has endeavoured to foster the spiritual care of the meeting is by organising many of the discussions mentioned below.

During 2019 to 2022 we have endeavoured to have a shared lunch once a month. The shared lunch is normally followed by a discussion on a particular topic. For obvious reasons this was curtailed during COVID.

These events are normally enjoyed by all who attend.

Topics for discussion can vary considerably. Sometimes the item is something that has come from Area Meeting or has emerged as a national concern. Other times we discuss something suggested by local Friends or we use a study book.

Julie Tucker

On Being a Warden...I have been the Warden of Evesham Quaker Meeting for over eight years now. I can remember saying at my interview that I saw the role as more of a way of life rather than a regular job, and one that I anticipated growing into in time. Both of these things have turned out to be true, although in ways I did not – indeed could not have – anticipated eight years ago. Four years ago I was diagnosed with a life-threatening condition that required major surgery. I had given up a part-time job as a radiographer prior to diagnosis and there was an interesting change in perspective from being a healthcare practitioner to becoming a patient. This was a turning point in my life, and it was a turning point in my relationship with my local Meeting. I was profoundly moved by the love and support I received, that made me realise, more strongly, that this is my home. I was fortunate my two younger sons were living with me at the time, and they helped to look after the Meeting House while I was in hospital, and while I was convalescing. Seven months after surgery, I was feeling fit and well, and I shall always consider myself fortunate that I was diagnosed and treated before the Pandemic. March 2020. Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 changes the world, changes lives, ends lives. Several days after the first lock down was announced, I was in the Meeting House, sitting at the piano, when I suddenly shivered, had a feeling I was ‘coming down with something...’ and our household went into isolation. Fortunately, it was a relatively mild illness initially. A week later, I was feeling improved and optimistic that a degree of immunity had been acquired. My sons were initially ignorant and sceptical about the requirements of quarantine when I told them they would not be going to work. Later during the lockdown, I told them that in years to come they would look back on this time with gratitude that during a lovely Spring, they had the space of the Peace Garden to enjoy. As a friend in Scotland said in a facebook post: “Imagine being a single parent on the tenth floor of a tower block.” I had no idea of what long covid was or would be; now three and a half years later, I’m a little wiser. Although I’m frequently compromised by fatigue, pain and impaired concentration and short-term memory, at least I don’t have to commute to work. There is a degree of flexibility in my duties and responsibilities and I consider myself fortunate again, that even if I cannot return to healthcare work, at least I have a job, a role that I can perform most of the time without compromise. The Pandemic has had consequences for our Meeting, and this will be a familiar story to other local and area Meetings. Although no members or attenders have been lost to covid fortunately, since 2019, Members have passed away, and some have moved away. Our attendance at our Meeting for Worship is about half of what it was a few years ago. We have lost half of our regular hirers: a weekly life-drawing group, a fortnightly Ladies’ Probus, a Shakespeare group that met weekly from October to April, the monthly Simon De Montfort Society. The demographics of the membership of these societies parallels our own. We host the Camera Club from September to the end of June. They used to attend weekly. Now it’s fortnightly, alternating with a Zoom Meeting. The Historical Society and the Arts Society continue with their monthly Meetings – the Historical Society from September to May, the Arts Society throughout the year. Their memberships have declined and their chairpersons have expressed their concerns about their continued viability. Men of the local Muslim community use the Meeting House for their

Friday prayers throughout the year. Their attendance level seems to be consistent, at least. I've heard it said on several occasions that 'We need more hirers.' While this might be true, it does not take into account the local economic and demographic factors that have affected us. At least we have become a popular venue for the growing Evesham Festival of Words over their main weekend. I performed a solo concert, a fund raiser, last year, and I was gratified by the help of Friends in making it work. We've had some ideas of organising a series of public lectures as outreach – could we get people into the Meeting House that might not even know about it? There are still the tasks of cleaning the Meeting House, sweeping the path, mowing the Peace Garden lawn, preparing the Meeting House for hirers, for Meeting for Worship, emails... Zoom Meetings with Friends – local groups or national groups like Discovering Quakers, Meeting House Matters (formerly Wardens Talking, which has been a wonderful resource and support organisation run by Oliver Waterhouse of Quaker Life)... shopping for milk, fairtrade tea, coffee, sugar and palm oil free biscuits, soap, toilet rolls, cleaning products... There's always something to do. I did say it was a way of life, and while we can all have our grumbles and our challenges, I'm grateful this is my way of life and my home.

Paul Heskett



Evesham Meeting House Peace Garden

The Peace Garden adjacent to the Meeting House in Evesham is a source of pride and joy to our Meeting. On numerous occasions I have heard expressions of surprise and delight when people visit, and discover the garden, especially from people who live locally and did not know of its existence.

When I was interviewed for the post of Warden of Evesham Quaker Meeting in 2015, I was asked about doing the gardening, and I informed the interview panel, that despite an appreciation of the aesthetics of a garden, I was not 'green fingered...' although I could do some basic caretaking tasks such as lawn mowing, some weeding and sweeping leaves.

Throughout the year, there's a lot to do to maintain this precious environment. We have been fortunate to have the help of our previous member Sarah Lane and her husband David, who regularly undertook gardening duties. Two years ago they moved to Yorkshire, and the Garden had some months of becoming overgrown in parts. Despite some members being keen gardeners, like most meetings, our demographics have resulted in a decline in numbers with an aging membership and attenders. We were fortunate to secure the services of Tracy Goldstraw, who has worked as our gardener with a weekly three-hour session since May last year, excluding the winter months of December, January and February. It's been my pleasure and privilege to assist her, usually on Thursday mornings, and slowly, my fingers have become a little greener. Tracy has bought plants for the garden and has an appreciation of its variety and management. We are both aware of how much effort is required to maintain it.

We are grateful to Ruth Owen, who redesigned – and virtually single-handedly - rearranged the compost area to make it fit for purpose. We frequently fill our garden bin, compress the garden waste as much as possible to get our money's worth; we have made the occasional tip run, and the occasional shopping trip to buy plants and shrubs.

We have our garden room now installed, intended as a replacement for the Children's Room (which is now the lounge of the upstairs flat of Number 28).

The garden is vibrant with the colours of tulips and blossom in April and May, but at any time of the year, it's a sanctuary and a little haven for wildlife. How wonderful sometimes to hear, in the middle of the town, the humming of bees, and robins, asking for food, amidst the resting place of Friends from earlier times.

And just a few weeks ago, we had a new group hiring the Meeting House, families with children, and a little girl said to me: 'What a beautiful garden you have here.'

She is absolutely right, of course.

Paul Heskett



The Library

There have been some recent changes to Evesham Meeting Library. When Littleton Mission closed, a number of books were repatriated to the Meeting House. Some of these were absorbed into its library but for reasons of duplication and limited space others were distributed amongst Local and Area Friends, Woodbrooke Library or finally gift-aided to the Oxfam Bookshop in Stratford.

Following the reconfiguration of Number 28 Cowl Street into flats and the loss of the children's room, it also became necessary to relocate approximately 50 early books belonging to Evesham Meeting. Many of these are leather bound volumes and date to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. A decision was taken by Friends that whilst these might realise useful funds if offered for sale, their greatest value is in fact to Quakers themselves and especially the local meeting to which some are dedicated. Advice has been taken about their care and maintenance and they remain openly accessible on the shelves.

Some additional space has been created by the removal of some books deemed less useful to Friends and, following local review and appraisal have also made their way to Oxfam.

Sylvia Melville