

QIY Trustees Report to QIY July 2019

Trustee changes:

Meg Forrest joined us very shortly after my last report. Helen Meads completed her service in December 2018 and was succeeded by David Bower. Also joining us in January 2019, Jane Morris came on board for Brighthouse West Yorkshire AM so I am very glad to report, that after a difficult gap, we are back to full complement with all our Area Meetings represented. Thank you to those who serve now and those who have served – and to the different Nominations Committees whose background work underpins what we do.

Introductory:

While each year is a mix of ongoing work and forward thinking, this one is proving exceptional in significant ways. For the last six months trustees have been involved in early-stage thinking about revitalising Quakers in Yorkshire and radically examining how we might make our systems lighter, less cumbersome – and reduce the workload on Friends at the same time! That theme rang through the whole of QIY's quarterly meeting when Paul Parker spoke to us in April – the buzz in the room was palpable. I want to flag up that prospect up now and then return to it at the end, after briefly outlining some of the nitty-gritty of the trustees' year and also commenting on some questions we have received in the last couple of days.

Money matters:

Last year Michael Sturge completed a tremendous gift of service as our Independent Examiner. He would be a hard act indeed to follow, both for his expertise and the behind the scenes support he has offered unstintingly. We decided that now is the time for us pay an external firm for this complex work, so our 2018 accounts are currently being examined by Crozier Jones, a Doncaster firm chosen from a number or region-wide firms who deal with charity accounts. The accounts show us strongly placed to think about and implement the best ways to use our funds for good.

I'll mention three funds here. We are making substantial awards from the **Adult School Union bequest**, thus getting closer to our goal of giving away the whole bequest in the next few years. Please encourage your meetings and Friends to apply for ASU grants; the support educational courses for adults to deepen their understanding of Quaker thought and work. We shall soon be ready to apply to the Charity Commission to enlarge the remit of the **Rawdon Fund**. We have continued to discern how we should like this to work, by giving a single, one-off grant to each of our young people as they reach the stage of moving into tertiary education/apprenticeship or whatever is right for them. The **Mary Forrest Meeting House Fund** is now open to loans as well as grants. Do consult the treasurer about conditions if this might be helpful to your meeting.

Queries received shortly before today's meeting:

I'll comment briefly on the issues raised.

1 Investment policy. We have spoken of this in a fairly recent report but it's always worth reiterating the principles on which our ethical investment policy is based. We see QIY's trustee work as long term. We hold our donors' endowed funds in trust, to use them for present good whilst also maintaining their value for future benefit to Quakers well into the latter part of the 21st century and beyond. This policy has served Friends well and is available for anyone to read in full. It fits with the thinking of Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke trustees. One development in line with recent legal changes is that we do now offer loans from endowed funds as I indicated a few minutes ago. In fact one Area Meeting is considering a Mary Forrest loan at this very time.

2 Supporting Farfield from our trust funds. I'm afraid the terms of the MF Meeting House Fund do not cover donations to a property we do not own – Friends sold Farfield years ago to the Historic Chapels Trust. So while it is good that Friends continue to arrange some worship there in summer months, the building simply does not come within our objects and our collective responsibility.

3 Do we have positive criteria for sustainable investment (as well as the obvious negative ones – no armaments, tobacco etc)? Indeed we do. In the last two years alone we have made significant investments in such companies as Greencoat Wind and Thrive Renewables (both wind power projects); Foresight Solar; the Responsible funds of Edentree, Janus Henderson, BMO, Impax and Menhaden. Again, Friends are welcome to ask the treasurer for more details.

4 Why have we not fully released the Linton Taylor bequest? As this matter has been very thoroughly aired over the last five years to my knowledge, I simply refer again to my opening remarks on our long term approach to our responsibilities: by keeping some of the bequest intact, we know we shall be able - if difficult circumstances recur - to help Glenthorne again, as we know the Glenthorne trustees would wish. They are well on track with repaying the current loan.

5 Do QIY Trustees put their money where their faith is, or their faith where their money is?

If life consisted of absolutes - either/or, rather than both/and - how different things would be! In my experience, life rarely works like that. I leave you to judge, Friends. You have chosen your trustee body - one Friend from each of our seven area meetings, plus a treasurer and clerk, both nominated to and appointed by this body. We endeavour to act with integrity in upholding the Quaker way of doing things within the boundaries of the law. As charity trustees we have the legal, moral and ethical responsibility to act in the best interests of the charity, manage resources responsibly and act with reasonable care and skill. Is this work not always exciting or risky or sufficiently religious? Beth Allen writes –

“I remember an outburst in MFS when Friends felt that BYM was becoming ‘just a well run charity.’ ‘I don't want to be part of a well-run charity. I want to be part of a religious group, a church’ said a weighty Friend.

The point is that we need to be an ordinary well run organisation with good structures and sensible practices which we then make extraordinary by transcending not discarding them.” [QFP 8.25]

As your trustees we aim to do the work laid on us sensibly, to keep in mind what it is for, what is its ultimate purpose, and to look ahead positively.

Looking ahead:

Which brings me back to where I began. Much of our energy at present is going towards the exciting prospect of QIY playing a useful role in the initiative to simplify and revitalise structures across the whole of our Yearly Meeting. Several of us were able to follow up Paul Parker’s session at QIY by hearing Jonathan Carmichael give a stunning presentation at Yearly Meeting in May. Between April and now, all the necessary background work has been taking place that will free up a new working group of QIY representatives from all our Area Meetings. We are asking them to set out a blueprint for reinvigorating Quakerism in Yorkshire with ideas for simpler structures that could offer a pattern for all. The group’s first meeting will take place in Leeds before the end of August and we look forward to what it will bring us.

Barbara Windle clerk to trustees

20.07.2019.