

## **Outreach report to Quakers in Yorkshire – Robert Keeble on behalf of Leeds Carlton Hill**

The year started with fair trade fortnight – for over ten years we have been giving away fairtrade bananas outside the Leeds Meeting House – the challenge is to give away about 1000 bananas in just two hours. In 2019 the cost of the bananas was met by a grant from the Outreach Projects committee. The bananas arrived and as is often the case, I had to ensure that they became fully ripened before the giveaway event took place. The weather was good, but cold and we should have found it easy to get to our target as everything appeared in our favour, however, the actual number of people able to help on the day was reduced compared to previous years, so it did feel like quite hard work, but eventually, all the bananas were gone

We have an Outreach which helps oversee the Outreach activities in Leeds. During the year we arranged to hold a Quaker Meeting for Worship at the XR event in Leeds, we ran a 'big breakfast' event at the Leeds Meeting House to support Christian Aid during Christian Aid Week, we hosted a monthly film night during the spring, as well as plays, and supported a 'Clean Air' day protest outside the Leeds Meeting House. We promoted 'Roots of Resistance', holding workshops and used the Leeds Meeting House 'chalk sign' at the front of the building. Today that large chalk sign reads 'There is something sacred in all people'.

The final big event of the year was the distribution of white poppies – this is the third year of this activity and we received a £600 grant to purchase 1000 poppies which were in addition to the 1000 poppies purchased by Carlton Hill meeting. Last year we distributed about 1500 poppies, including 1000 outside the Meeting House, mainly to students, so our target of 2000 did not seem overambitious... On Saturday 26th we planned to distribute 1000 White Peace Poppies on Briggate, which is the main pedestrianised shopping street in Leeds. On that morning my shoes were still wet from the day before so I had to resort to wearing plastic bags as well as socks on my feet. Keith had arranged the street collection permits and arrived at the prearranged 9.30am to collect the table and pickup both Tracey and myself – he dropped us off in the city centre and then we carried said table and bags of 'stuff' – just a short walk and then by 10am everything was set up at the permitted location – there was only one problem.....it was pouring with rain. Despite the best efforts of the volunteers, after an hour, it became apparent that the event was a 'wash-out' – shoppers were wet and had no time to stop; the volunteers were soaked with numbed fingers and to cap it all, the Peace Poppies were literally disintegrating.... The permit was for four hours at four collection points, but we were beaten by the weather and had to abandon the session, retreating to a nearby café to warm up and slowly 'drip dry'. In our very wet hour we only had about 20 or so customers. Could we redeem the situation at our next big event outside the Meeting House on Friday 8th November? Friday was cold, but dry and boded well for our challenge of giving away 1000+ Peace Poppies. Unfortunately, the number of helpers was down on previous years and some friends were delayed in joining us for the 8am to 10am session, so we fell well short of our target with only 400 or so distributed – it felt much harder than in previous years which is quite mystifying.

Overall, whilst we are being quite active in organising outreach events in Leeds, it is clear that this has been a more challenging year with fewer people willing or able to volunteer.

We are very grateful the Outreach grants as they do take some of the pressure off us which makes it easier to think about doing Outreach in the future.