

FRIARGATE ELDERS: REPORT FOR 2017

“The Religious Society of Friends is organized into local meetings each of which should be a community. It is the search for God’s way that has drawn us together. In our meeting we can each hope to find love, support, challenge, practical help and a sense of belonging. We should bring ourselves as we are, whatever our age, our strength, our weakness; and be able to share friendship and warmth.” QFP 10.03

During the early part of the year 2017, we welcomed Ben Arnup and Raymond Williams as newly appointed elders and half way through the year Brenda Tyler resumed her full duties as her period of office as Sheriff’s Lady drew to a close. We were pleased to be up to our full complement numerically (12) which hasn’t been the case for some time.

We have begun a process in our monthly elders’ meetings designed to deepen these and to meet our own spiritual needs. We now devote the first 30 minutes of our meeting to a topic of relevance to our eldership, such as Meetings for Clearness, what being a duty elder on Sunday involves spiritually and practically, and the role of elders in Friends funerals and memorial meetings for worship. We use creative listening as our main tool once the topics have been introduced. This process has proved fruitful and productive and has enabled us to ‘slow down’ and to be more reflective rather than having a tendency to rush through an often full agenda.

We have had a large number of deaths amongst Friends in the past year (8) and whilst at times this has seemed to stretch our resources we have learnt a lot about different ways of meeting the needs of bereaved relatives in as sensitive a way as possible. The practical implications of finding sufficient space at the meeting house and considering other possible venues when it is never known how many people might attend such meetings is an on-going issue.

On a lighter note we have been present at 2 weddings this year and we have also had the delightful task of welcoming one baby into our Friargate meeting in the spring of 2017. We are continually grateful for the work of our children's and young person's committee and seek ways to support them as we fully acknowledge their task is an important one and deserves the support of all our members.

We have continued to respond to the request for elders to attend meetings for worship at Lamel Beeches, and alongside overseers and others from Friargate, we have come to see attendance at these as bestowing mutual benefits; similarly we have conducted a full programme of meetings for worship in the homes of Friends who are unable to reach Friargate. Elders are involved in compiling a rota and attending mid-week meetings for worship at Friargate which continue to draw anything from 1 to 8 worshippers. Three elders were involved in holding a Meeting for Clearness with an attender on the subject of whether or not to apply for membership, which had a positive outcome for all concerned.

For the second year we initiated the laying of a wreath of white poppies by one of our young people at the civic event on Remembrance Sunday and hope that this has now become an established practice.

We have again started to read once a month from Advices and Queries in our Sunday meetings for worship in the order that these appear in the red book. We decided to read them chronologically after we noted that, when left to individual preference, the less popular tended to be overlooked. This practice followed on from a successful initiative in the previous year when elders read from a passage in QFP once a month. This formed part of the wider Quaker initiative taking place at meetings all over the country to read and discuss chapters from QFP in order to consider the overall revision of this text. This process of enquiry had the positive effect in our meeting of evolving into a successful study group with a fluctuating but committed membership who enjoyed getting to know this book more intimately.

This had followed on from another successful study group which had continued into the early part of 2017- the reading and

discussion of Meg Chignell's book on St John. This also had an enthusiastic core of regular members. When that came to an end, another of our elders initiated the monthly meeting of a Brunch Group exploring various Quaker topics, which ended in December this year with a Friend from Acomb examining biblical passages with an eager group. 'Afterword' has started up on the second Sunday of the month for a trial 6 month period and the first session was well attended.

We have also enjoyed meeting twice this year with overseers to explore matters of mutual concern and to get to know one another better. Similarly we have participated in Area Meeting's Joint Elders and Overseers meetings and will be hosting such an event at Friargate this coming year.

2017 was the final year of service of our Friends Alison Forrester and David Laverick. We thanked them for all they had contributed over the past two trimesters and welcomed their successors- Madeleine Kay and Donald Purves- with whom we look forward to working.

In conclusion we would say that we have done our best to 'hold' a meeting that has experienced a lot of change and upheaval in the past 12 months, both in terms of the loss of many dear Friends through death and the unexpected and sudden departure of paid staff. We have tried to demonstrate warmth, care and concern for our meeting, as we believe that, "it is in nurturing the spiritual life of our community that we will be brought closer to one another and to God." (QFP 12.11)

Barbara Webb and Brenda Tyler