

Meetings for Suffering. April the 1st 2017

The 345 meeting houses in the UK are all in good repair: 46% are listed and there is no need to worry about the one in Whitby as it is now an Italian restaurant. These facts were examples of the findings of the Quaker Meeting Houses Heritage Project which is now being laid down, and were reported to us in the context of the BYM Trustees Annual Report delivered to us at the latest Meetings for Suffering. The report also turned its attention to Scotland where BYM is funding a parliamentary engagement officer and continuing funding/research for QUNO in Geneva on the impact on humans of climate change. All very topical! We were also delighted to hear that Friends House has been awarded a Carbon Smart Gold Award for a significant ongoing reduction in carbon use. We also heard that there is a move afoot to encourage AM meetings to report back on sustainability to Trustees as we put into practice our commitment to sustainability.

Next up was the Quaker Stewardship Committee (QSC) Report. Here we learnt that all AMs last year met the deadline for reports and accounts. A pat on the back! This committee sees its remit as good governance so that faith and action can flourish. As MfS reps we have been encouraged to seek responses from AM Trustees on the following three questions:

1. How can QSC support Trustees and Treasurers?
2. How are the AM reports used? For example, Leeds has two annual reports, one that meets the requirements of the Charities Commission and another used for outreach purposes?
3. How can Meetings which find Trustees and Treasurers hard to find survive into the future?
Some AMs, for example have joined together.

After lunch, Barbara Windle reported back on Quaker World Relations Committee. I personally was heartened to hear that this is the committee that issues letters upholding Friends all over the world in the light when they are faced with challenging circumstances. Friends are outward looking and letters have been sent to Burundi in the light of community violence. Letters were sent to France YM, Belgium and Luxembourg YM as well as Germany YM who have all experienced acts of terrorism recently. An interesting question was raised in the context of sustainability - how do we maintain links with Friends worldwide and at the same time keep our carbon footprint down? Perhaps skyping really is the answer! There is already a Skype Experiment with Light and worship via Skype at Woodbrooke.

Female/male/other? We spent some time reflecting on a minute from North East London AM about being more inclusive of transgender and non- binary people in our meetings. The Tabular Statement of Friends House already has these three categories and the question was asked whether our meetings should be more mindful of this concern. Perhaps our book of members and attenders could reflect this extra category in future? British Quaker Young people are particularly minded to place more importance on this current understanding of gender identity.

Sarah Allen. Meetings for Suffering Representative (York AM). April 2017.