

Wensleydale & Swaledale Area Quaker Meeting Annual Report 2009

It has been a challenging year for our Area Meeting, as we have sought to define our rôle as a small worshipping community of Quakers in the Dales. We have made a number of important decisions and struggled to clarify our relationships with each other, between our local meetings and with our local Quaker Trust. We started the year with 38 members and ended it with 36, having sadly recorded the deaths of two of our Friends. Although we are glad to record the names of many actively committed attenders in our address list, thus doubling our numbers, the fact remains that the shortage of those in formal membership makes it difficult for us to fill all the posts we need to remain a viable Area Meeting (AM). We have, after two years, at last been able to appoint our Area Meeting Council (AMC), our AM's trustee body, in readiness for eventual charitable registration, but keeping its membership up to strength, as Friends complete their terms of service, will be a continuing test for us. We were unable to appoint a second representative to serve on Meeting for Sufferings, which limits our effective participation in the wider Yearly Meeting. A number of Friends are over-burdened by serving in several capacities at the same time and this affects the relationships in our community.

In November 2008 the AM set up a group to look at our structures and this group met twice before reporting in May. We acknowledged the importance of maintaining flexibility in our arrangements and of sharing the tasks, but we have not so far felt ready to take more radical action. We held a special AM in February to look at our Meeting's activity and witness in the context of the new national Quaker *Framework for Action*. We were pleasantly surprised and encouraged by the breadth of our interests and involvement as individuals. We expressed considerable interest in green issues; the Meeting has subsequently joined the Living Witness Project and Friends have been involved in some of the initiatives on climate change suggested by QPSW and Woodbrooke.

We have tried to clarify our ways of working and we have sent members of our AMC on trustee training days. In May we agreed the principles which underpin our nominations procedures. Recent experience has prompted our Elders and Overseers to review our funeral arrangements and responsibilities. AM has endorsed their suggestions to improve our procedures. In July we agreed some guidelines concerning our relationship with the Wensleydale & Swaledale Monthly Meeting Trusts, which has now been formally amalgamated as the Wensleydale & Swaledale Quaker Trust (W&SQT). This Trust is registered as an independent charity, although its trustees are appointed by our AM, and we needed to clarify the ways in which we are able to apply for grants from the Trust, both as an AM and as individuals. We appreciate the generous way in which we are supported by the W&SQT, especially when our numbers are falling.

Having heard about the successful outcome of the Peace Poetry Competition sponsored last year by the W&SQT on the initiative of one of our members, we agreed in November to support a second competition to be held in schools early in 2010. The AM also revisited the suggestions relating to the green burial movement, following a threshing meeting held at Leyburn. We decided not to take the matter further as an AM concern.

We received reports during the year from Friends attending the Yearly Meeting Gathering in York, and on Quaker organised conferences as well as regular Meeting for Sufferings reports. We all benefit from the attendance at these meetings by our representatives and on several occasions their experience has stimulated further meetings to explore the issues raised. The financial support of the W&SQT has enabled us to participate more frequently in national Quaker events than would otherwise be possible in view of our dwindling numbers. We are thankful for the generosity of our Quaker forebears, which has enabled us to benefit in this way.

The year is ending with one of our meeting houses, at Bainbridge, in the throes of essential remedial building work to address a longstanding material problem with damp.. Bainbridge Friends are meeting temporarily at Countersett. In the coming year we as an Area Meeting will continue to face the spiritual and social challenges which underlie questions about structures and viability in our small and historic Quaker community.

Janet Quilley, Clerk