

Quakers

The Religious Society of Friends

Your Guide to East Scotland Area Meeting

2012

www.quakerscotland.org

This booklet is an attempt to explain briefly how East Scotland Area Meeting operates, and how individual Friends, local meetings and area meeting are interdependent.

At the end of this booklet we recommend several books as further reading, but suggest you might like to start with the following now:

Advices and Queries

Quaker Faith and Practice

Harvey Gillman : "A Light that is Shining"

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All Quakers in Scotland belong to the General Meeting for Scotland which is divided into four Area Groups of which ours is called East Scotland.

East Scotland Area Meeting is a network of local worshipping groups. Each group has its own characteristics according to location and size, and brings its own particular value to the life and work of Friends in this part of Scotland. Area meeting is the name given to both the network of local meetings and to the meeting for business affairs which supports all Quaker activities in the area. As Quakers, our membership responsibility is to our area meeting.

The four local meetings are in Angus, Dundee, Perth, and St. Andrews. Each has its own clerks and, in addition to their individual meetings for worship, each also attends to their own practical needs and projects through their meetings for business affairs. They bring forward business to the area meeting.

We use the word 'meeting' both for groupings of Friends at various geographical levels – local, area, general and yearly – and for the associated meetings for business affairs, as well as for meetings for worship.

The Religious Society of Friends is the full title of our organisation. The more common name "Quaker" is used informally, and "Friends" as members.

The following abbreviations will be used from time to time throughout this booklet:

LM local meeting
AM area meeting

GM General Meeting for Scotland
BYM Britain Yearly Meeting.

Quaker meeting for worship is held in silence and lasts for approximately one hour. We have no paid minister to lead us, no liturgy or hymns. The meeting begins as soon as the first member has sat down and composed him or herself. As other Friends gather we move into our silent worship together. The silence itself is very important to Friends and is not broken lightly, being not merely the absence of sound but a period of reverent and expectant waiting on the will of God. The traditional phrase describing the first portion of the meeting is that of 'centring down', meaning the gradual discarding of the worries and distractions of the world.

When any Friend feels moved to speak into the silence their words should be listened to attentively and considered carefully. It is not advisable to follow too soon on another's ministry, firstly because this may lead to incomplete consideration of the first ministry by members of the meeting, and, secondly, because haste may mean that the subsequent ministry represents the speaker's own thoughts rather than a guiding by God. However, nobody should feel inhibited from speaking by their own shortcomings; they will be listened to with love and respect. Friends sometimes speak of a 'gathered meeting': gathering is the drawing together in spiritual communion or 'oneness' and can be a sufficiently uplifting and humbling experience to need no verbal ministry.

At the end of the hour the meeting is closed. The signal for this is the shaking of one's neighbours' hands as initiated by one of the elders present. The clerk or correspondence clerk of the meeting then reads out any notices of committee meetings,

forthcoming events, news of members absent through illness, and so on, concluding with an invitation to all present to stay for a cup of coffee and a chat. There will be a bowl near the door for any donations for Quaker work or other causes.

There are many Friends in our area meeting who were brought up in Quaker families and have continued to be members and there are also many who have come into the Society from other denominations or none. They will have progressed in their spiritual journey from being enquirers to becoming regular attenders at a meeting and then applying for membership of the Society.

You will find that once you have been attending on a fairly regular basis Friends will begin to refer to you as an attender. You will probably be asked whether you wish your name to be included in the 'Book of Members and Attenders' produced for all Quakers in Scotland.

As you become more committed to Friends, you will be encouraged to take a fuller part in the life of the meeting and the Society as a whole but there will be no pressure put on you to apply for membership. If you feel you wish information or advice, do speak to someone, for example an overseer or an elder.

You can apply for membership as soon as you feel ready (see section 12).

The primary responsibility of **elders** is to foster the spiritual well-being of the meeting: to help Friends deepen their experience of worship, understand better the principles underlying Quaker worship and work out the implications of religious faith and everyday life in a rapidly changing world. They encourage preparation of mind and spirit, the study of the Bible and other writings that are spiritually helpful, and arrange discussion groups to help Friends share their spiritual reflection.

Their concern is both for the meeting and for each Friend within it. These responsibilities and concerns are accepted corporately and individually by the elders who meet frequently for worship and discussion both as AM elders and in smaller LM groups.

Elders promote the right holding of meetings for worship and are responsible together with all other members for the fitness of the ministry within them. They ensure the quiet gathering of the meeting and encourage punctuality. They seek to discern the needs of the meeting as a whole: some Friends may need to be encouraged to speak, others may perhaps rise too easily to their feet and very occasionally it may be necessary to restrain unsuitable ministry.

Elders have no special priestly, ministerial or other kind of authoritative function to distinguish them from Friends at large. Elders are appointed for three years and there are usually two or three elders in each local meeting.

You are encouraged to talk or write to any of the elders whenever you feel this would be helpful.

Overseers are concerned for the pastoral care of the meeting: that is, the personal well-being of everyone connected to it,

whether member, attender, enquirer or visitor. They try to help create a welcoming atmosphere of warmth, friendship and mutual commitment in which everyone is appreciated for their own particular gifts and is given an opportunity to use them.

Every member and attender is assigned to one of the three or four overseers in each local meeting. If anyone is ill overseers will make sure they are visited and cared for by someone in the meeting. They try to be aware of other troubles too and help work out what can be done to offer loving support. They play a part in good communications within meetings, passing on news of happy events, special occasions, of births and deaths.

Overseers encourage attendance at meeting for worship and meeting for business. They give advice and information about how to apply for membership. Together with elders, overseers exercise care over children and young people associated with the meeting, and take particular care of the needs of enquirers and attenders.

The responsibilities of elders and overseers overlap in many instances so there is always close co-operation between them. You are welcome to talk to any of them whenever you feel it might be helpful to you.

Although we have appointed elders and overseers we should not leave the work to them alone. The BYM challenge of 1851 is as clear cut and strong as ever: "We are all to watch over one another for good and be mutually interested one for another." We are all encouraged to share in responsible caring for one another and for the well being of the meeting community as a whole.

For a full description of the responsibility of elders and overseers read Quaker Faith and Practice Section 12.12-12.13

All Quakers in Britain are part of Britain Yearly Meeting. Much of the centrally held and managed policy, property and work for BYM is based in Friends House in London. BYM is made up of a network of Local and Area Meetings arranged so that each member belongs to a group large enough to be self-supporting but small enough for there to be personal contact and friendship between all individuals.

BYM also refers to the annual assembly of Quakers which in session acts as the final decision making authority for Quakers in Britain. Any Friend is entitled to attend. A regular attender wishing to go to BYM will need to obtain a letter of recommendation from the clerk of their local meeting. At BYM, concerns and matters of importance to Friends in the whole of Britain are considered and decisions made. These are recorded in the form of Minutes written by the Clerk.

Meeting for Sufferings, is the national representative body for Quakers in Britain. It meets five times per year and is made up of representatives from area meetings, General Meeting for Scotland, the Meeting of Friends in Wales; Young Friends General Meeting and the BYM Trustees. Meeting for Sufferings continues the business of Yearly Meeting between its annual gatherings.

The seventeen BYM Trustees meet six times a year. They were first appointed at BYM 2006 and are managing trustees of the work, assets and property held by Britain Yearly Meeting.

General Meeting for Scotland plays a consultative role acting on behalf of Friends in Scotland and meets for business four times a year rotating among venues in the four AMs. GM acts, and makes appointments, on behalf of Friends in Scotland, and its meetings also provide opportunities for renewal and inspiration.

The basic 'building block' of Quaker administration is the area meeting. In all, there are four area meetings for Scotland – east, north, west and south east. AM is the body to which application for membership is made, and has responsibility for all matters relating to membership. For more information see section 7

The smallest unit is the local meeting. Each LM has its own clerk, treasurer, elders and overseers and is responsible to the AM for the right holding of meeting for worship and for pastoral care. In East Scotland there are four LMs: in Angus, Dundee, Perth and St. Andrews.

See the chart on the back page.

Angus Meeting

Meeting for Worship presently takes place four times per month (none arranged on fifth Sundays)

1st , 2nd and 3rd Sundays: 11am Montrose Day Care Centre, Panmure Place.

4th Sundays: 11am in Lilac Cottage, Rossie Braes, Montrose.

There is no separate children's meeting at present. All age worship is arranged from time to time.

There are regular discussion groups arranged after meeting for worship and a shared lunch. The programme is distributed annually after consultation with the meeting on topics.

Dundee Meeting

Dundee Friends meet for worship every Sunday at 10.30am in the meeting house at 7 Whitehall Crescent. This building, owned by a trust for the benefit of the LM, has been in Quaker ownership since it was built in 1892/93. Apart from a 10 year break from 1913-1923 it has been used continuously for meeting for worship and is easily recognised by its stone carved 'Meeting House' inscription at first floor level.

The children's meeting is held the first Sunday of the month (except school holidays). The children attend the last ten minutes of the adult meeting which is then followed by a shared lunch. There is a monthly Book Group which runs

from September to June and various organized meetings for spiritual discussion and social events during the year.

Perth Meeting

Meeting for Worship is held in Perth on the second and last Sunday of each month at 11.00am in 7 St Leonard's Bank, Perth (Subud Centre). A children's meeting is organised when needed and children come in for the last 10 minutes of the Meeting for Worship. After the Elders have closed the meeting, there is a short continuation of worship called "Afterwords", which gives people a chance to share any thoughts or concerns that were not appropriate as ministry.

Quakers have been meeting in private homes in Perth for over 100 years. Members and Attenders are very scattered, so 'house meetings' are arranged frequently each month. There is one every third Sunday in Lethendy.

Discussion groups are held in Pitcairngreen, Abernethy and Bridge of Gaur. There is usually a social event in January. During the summer there is a trip to Pitlochry theatre.

St Andrews Meeting

Meeting for worship is held every Sunday at 10.30am in 2 Howard Place, St. Andrews. A children's class is held every Sunday in term time. The children usually join the adults for the last ten minutes of worship.

There is a mid-week meeting for worship every Thursday from 1.15-1.45 followed by refreshments. Regular discussion groups and shared lunches are arranged in response to the needs of the meeting.

Our area meeting (East Scotland) is made up of the members of the four constituent Local Meetings (Angus, Dundee, Perth and St Andrews).

One of the purposes of the AM is to promote and support Quaker activities. It is responsible for enhancing the spiritual development of members and attenders. Meeting together regularly brings us into friendship and community with each other.

AM is the principal business meeting for East Scotland and meets four times a year rotating around the four LMs. Items on peace issues, education, matters of social responsibilities at home and abroad may all feature on the agenda, as well as membership details and practical affairs to do with the running of the area meeting. AM appoints a representative to Meeting for Sufferings (see section 6) and has responsibility to ensure good liaison with it. AM is the body which enables and encourages Friends to attend conferences and gatherings, thereby helping them to experience and understand the Society of Friends in its wider form. It is the responsibility of the AM to deal with membership, arrangements for marriages and funerals; finance; AM property; and items of concern from LMs, GM, BYM, and Meeting for Sufferings. AM receives names suggested by the Nominations Committee for vacant posts. (see section 9)

To keep those unable to attend AM fully informed of decisions taken the minutes are printed in the Tayside Quaker, our local newsletter.

Attendees are very welcome at AMs and should advise the clerk of their intention several days in advance. A Friend will then be appointed to 'befriend' the attendee on the occasion of their first visit to explain and guide on procedures.

Quaker business meetings, or meetings for church affairs, are conducted in a distinctive manner, rather different from most church or secular organisations. They are at the same time meetings for worship, beginning and ending with a period of silence. Decisions are reached through an exercise in the discernment of God's will.

This means that all present must come prepared but with an open mind, so as not to be unalterably committed to a certain course of action. Discussion takes place in an atmosphere of reflective listening, each person contributing their own perception of the issue, but without directly contradicting previous statements. When considering an agenda item a person is generally expected only to speak once. There is never any voting.

The clerk has the responsibility of discerning whether the meeting as a whole is reaching unity, perhaps by offering a brief summary in a 'trial Minute' and inviting focused comment. Each person present has the responsibility of sharing the task of discernment, all working towards the best decision. The clerk and assistant clerk are the 'servants of the meeting' with the task of discerning 'the sense of the meeting', so that they do not offer personal opinions or participate directly except to give information or clarify a factual point.

Minutes are written and read out by the clerk within the meeting to be accepted then and there.

In the absence of an ordained ministry and of conventional authority structures, Friends attach a good deal of importance to the way in which appointments are made.

When a vacancy arises (for trustees, elders, overseers, clerks, treasurers, correspondents, librarians etc) it will usually be referred to the Nominations Committee, which is itself appointed by the relevant business meeting. Referral in this way gives time for enquiry and reflection and for some discussion with possible nominees on the nature and responsibilities of the commitments they are being invited to undertake. The nominations are then brought forward to the business meeting for formal appointment. The business meeting can, and occasionally does, question a recommendation. Most but not all appointments require the person to be in membership of the Society. In making an appointment potential qualities are looked for as well as proven ability. Friends are invited to accept a post rather than putting themselves forward and there is never a vote.

Appointments are normally for three years. Some Friends may be reappointed for a second three-year term but ideally that would be the maximum without a break. The idea is to share experience as widely as possible among our membership. Most appointments at AM are for the same three-year period or 'triennium', but a rolling system is used for nominations committee, elders and overseers and some BYM appointments to ensure sufficient continuity. There are 'job descriptions' for all those nominated to help in deciding if they should accept.

Area meeting looks on the care and education of the children as an essential part of its responsibilities, asking elders on its behalf 'to ensure provision of religious education for Friends, attenders and children in the meeting'. Children and young people will also be allocated to an overseer who is asked to be responsible for their 'pastoral care'.

Each Local Meeting with children makes their own arrangements when children attend meeting for worship. In addition there are opportunities for Young People to meet informally and in programmed activities at evenings and weekends. The organisers of the Summer Gathering Shindig for young people are always keen to hear from potential helpers.

Junior Yearly Meeting for 16 – 18 year olds is arranged by Quaker Life and is the largest national gathering of this age group in Britain for young Friends who are nominated and financed by Area Meeting.

to hear from potential helpers.

Stewardship of money and material resources of any kind is an important responsibility and should be carried out in a way that is consistent with our religious convictions and our testimony that faith and day-to-day living cannot be separated.

The Religious Society of Friends needs funds for many purposes. Sustaining the organisation of the Society, social projects at home and abroad, the relief of suffering, international peace and reconciliation work and outreach are some of them. This is central work, overseen by BYM Trustees.

Locally there are costs to be met as well. These include enabling our Friends and attenders to participate in conferences and gatherings as well as supporting the work of the General Meeting for Scotland and Northern Friends Peace Board. Local meetings require funding, for example for rent or maintenance of premises.

The main source of funds for Quaker work is the giving of Friends from their personal resources. Individuals make donations to their LM treasurer, who allocates it according to need while following any preferences expressed by each donor. A proportion of these contributions is used locally and the rest sent to Friends House in London to sustain the central work. Alternatively donors may send contributions directly to Friends House.

Friends are encouraged to give regularly according to their means and to gift aid donations where possible so that income tax may be recovered.

The local treasurer is always willing to answer queries and give help and advice on any of these matters.

Becoming a member implies acceptance of responsibility and a sense of commitment. It has been described as 'an outward sign of a truly personal involvement'. As a member you can share and contribute to the life of the whole Society and at the same time be enriched yourself. You can make a commitment to support the meeting for worship, to help attend to its business affairs and to make such contribution as you can to the life and work of Friends through service and financial donation.

If you are beginning to think seriously of applying for membership you would find it helpful to gain more background information by visiting one or two other meetings and to observe both the local meeting and area meeting at work and see how Quaker business is carried out. Enquirers' weekends are also held at various Quaker residential centres and are usually advertised on meeting house noticeboards. If you have been reading about Quaker belief and practice and would like to discuss your findings, you are advised to seek out an elder or overseer, or another Friend you have come to know, who would be very glad to share your interest. From time to time, at meetings planned for enquirers, an opportunity is created for you to hear about different aspects of Quakerism and to have your questions discussed.

When you feel ready to apply for membership you should write to the AM clerk. The area meeting will then appoint two Friends as representatives to visit you and talk over in an informal way what your experience of Quaker life and worship has been and why you have applied for membership.

Friends do encourage applications but they respect the integrity and independence of attenders and are sensitive about bringing pressure to bear on anyone to do so.

See Chapter 11 of Quaker Faith and Practice (Membership) and Chapter 10 (Belonging to a Quaker Meeting)

When and where is area meeting held?

It is held four times a year, rotating round the four local meetings. It is in the meeting house when in St Andrews or Dundee, and in rented premises when in Perth and Angus. The time and place of the next AM can be found in the Tayside Quaker.

Would I be welcome at business meetings, local or area?

Yes indeed. It is hoped that all members will share in the responsibility of its business affairs. Attenders are welcome to be present, but should ask the clerk beforehand. (See section 5 'Area Meeting')

Can I speak at area meeting if I am an attender?

Your comments will be welcomed by Friends. It is usual for attenders to have been present at several meetings to gain an understanding of Quaker business methods before they speak.

How can I find out more about becoming a member?

Ask any overseer, elder or Friend for information and guidance. When you feel ready, write to the clerk (see section 12 'Membership')

Am I a 'good enough person' to join the Society?

There is, and can be, no assessment of performance or contribution. Each one of us is a fallible and vulnerable human being. The Religious Society of Friends has its foundation in faith and love, not in judgements of individuals.

I can't honestly call myself a complete pacifist. Would this disqualify me from membership?

Friends have no credal tests of any kind. Each person travels their own spiritual journey. However we do corporately hold to the Peace Testimony which testifies to our conviction that war is contrary to the spirit of Christ. Do approach an elder if you wish to discuss this further.

I can't honestly call myself a Christian. Would this disqualify me from membership?

Not necessarily. The Society, essentially Christian in its inspiration, asks for no specific affirmation of faith and understands Christianity primarily in terms of discipleship. Quakerism's freedom from dogma allows the questioning of many traditional Christian doctrines. Do approach an elder if you wish to discuss this further.

Can Friends assist me to deal with a problem or uncertainty in my personal life or to make some decision?

Sometimes Friends ask for a meeting for clearness, where a small group, using their collective insights and experience, searches for fresh approaches to problems without necessarily coming up with complete answers. A meeting for clearness can be arranged through an elder or overseer, or if you prefer, through any Friend that you know well.

What are the arrangements for children at meeting for worship?

Children are a vital part of our Quaker family. They have their own meeting but, importantly, share with us a part of the worship hour. Have a word with a member of the children's committee.

Can my expenses for committee or other work for Friends be reimbursed, or should I think of this as part of my financial contribution to the Society?

Nobody should be prevented from serving the Society for financial reasons. The AM treasurer can supply you with a claim form.

How can I obtain financial help, perhaps for attending a conference or for my children to attend Young Friends Summer Gathering?

Discuss this with an overseer and with their support write to the AM treasurer giving full details of the reason for your request, expected cost, and the level of financial help required. The treasurer will advise you on possible assistance from AM funds, or other sources of bursary assistance.

If I am supported by area meeting to attend a conference, how can I best share the experience with others?

You are asked to write a brief report for the AM which may be used in the Tayside Quaker. It is not necessary for this to cover in detail every item in the programme, but Friends find it interesting to know of aspects which have stood out for some reason. If you feel that some of the questions raised would merit wider discussion, you could ask to have them raised at the next discussion group, or it may be appropriate for the special topic session at AM.

Some words and phrases familiar among Friends

Attender – one who shows a measure of commitment to attending meeting for worship but has not yet become a member of the Society.

Centring down – the process of settling into worship, as we quietly set aside preoccupations of the moment and become aware of the movement of the Spirit within and among us.

Concern – to do something under concern is to act according to a strong leading of the Spirit, sometimes after testing at the business meeting.

Epistle – a formal letter addressed to Friends in general, drawn up by Yearly Meeting, Junior Yearly Meeting or other appropriate body, to convey the substance of the meeting's deliberations.

Gathered meeting – a meeting for worship in which we have a palpable sense of being drawn closely to one another as we sit together in the Real Presence. In 1672 Frances Howgill described this experience when he said 'The Kingdom of God did come and catch us all as in a net'.

In right ordering – an action, personal or corporate, which conforms to Quaker principles and is felt to be appropriate.

Membership Clerk – the Friend appointed by AM to maintain an official register of members.

Meeting for Clearness – a small gathering called in response to a Friend's request for help in deciding about a course of action or in solving a problem of some kind. Participants may be

chosen informally by the Friend seeking help or may be appointed by the meeting itself) eg through elders or overseers).

Meeting for Sufferings –the representative body for the Britain Yearly Meeting which has been charged with a' visionary and prophetic role for the life of the Yearly Meeting to draw our whole community together, to work for a better world'

Outreach – the work of making Quakerism known to a wider public.

Peace Testimony – the best known of Quaker testimonies; generally shared conviction and witness among Friends that the violence and destruction of war are intrinsically evil and against the will of god. The testimony is linked to the conviction that there is that of God in everyone.

Plain Speech – the language traditionally used by Friends to cut through what were perceived as social pretensions and barriers. All, for example, were to be addressed as 'thee or 'thou' irrespective of social status or rank. The present-day form is the widespread preference by Friends for omitting titles of any kind including Mr, Mrs, Miss and Ms.

Programmed meeting - a meeting for worship with pre-planned readings, speaking and music. A practice followed by many YM's outwith Britain Yearly Meeting.

Common acronyms used –

NFPB	Northern Friends Peace Board
QPSW	Quaker Peace and Social Witness
QL	Quaker Life
QCCIR	Quaker Committee for Interfaith Relationships
FWCC	Friends World Committee for Consultation
ACTS	Action of Churches Together in Scotland
EAPPI	Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel

Tayside Quaker is our AM newsletter, published monthly. It keeps us informed of area meeting business and activities and gives short reports from Meeting for Sufferings and conferences.

The **Scottish Friend** is a quarterly newsletter with information about activities of Friends in Scotland. It also contains 'News from meetings' throughout Scotland. A miscellany of information about matters great and small.

The Book of Members and Attenders is published every 2 years and helps us in Scotland to keep in touch with each other. It gives details about meetings for worship and identifies clerks and correspondents, elders and overseers, representatives and other appointments. It can be purchased at your meeting.

Many Friends keep in touch with wider work thorough reading **The Friend** (published weekly), **Quaker Monthly**, **Quaker News** (published quarterly) and the **Friends Quarterly**.

The Quakers in Britain website has a wealth of information and can be found at **www.quaker.org.uk**

These books are suggested as reading material for enquirers. Dundee, Montrose and St. Andrews have well-stocked libraries from which books may be borrowed.

Advices and Queries

This is a slim little booklet usually well in evidence in our meeting houses. It is a reminder of the Society's spiritual insights as developed and experienced over the years. It contains not rules but guides for reflection.

Quaker Faith and Practice: the book of Christian discipline of the Society of Friends

An anthology of writing and extracts illustrating the spiritual life of many Friends from George Fox to the present time. Describes and gives facts and counsel about church affairs; the structure of the organisation of BYM and its constituent meetings; procedure for marriages, funerals and memorial meetings; membership; caring for one another etc.

Introducing Quakers by George Gorman.

Deals with meeting for worship, ministry, business meetings and all the basics of Quakerism. Concentrates on the contemporary Society of Friends. Clear and informative.

The Amazing fact of Quaker Worship by George Gorman.

Two-fold aim: (i) to describe the way Quakers worship , and (ii) to encourage Friends to look at the way their religious experience expresses itself. As well as the subjects covered in *Introducing Quakers*, Gorman writes on 'God language' as well as on Quakers in the wider community. Sensible, kindly, clear.

Becoming Friends is an innovative learning project which aims to nurture and support those who are new to Friends. The course is available online and in print format

Solid lines indicate lines of direct responsibility

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Preface

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MMeeting Meeting

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Appendix A – A Quaker Glossary

Appendix B - Publications

Appendix C - Book List

Angus
Quaker Meeting

Meeting for Sufferings

Dundee
Quaker Meeting

Britain Yearly Meeting

East Scotland AM

Perth
Quaker Meeting

General Meeting for Scotland

St Andrews Quaker
Meeting