Quakers in Scotland Website Development Steering Group

In June 2015 General Meeting set up a steering group to guide the development of the Quakers in Scotland website, http://www.quakerscotland.org, which General Meeting noted "has various shortcomings". The group comprises representatives from the four Area Meetings in Scotland, the GM Administrator and the web manager. We were appointed on 1ˢᵗ January 2016, and one of our first actions has been to write this article to raise awareness of the site among Friends, and keep Friends informed about what's going on.

A brief history of QuakerScotland.org

The QuakerScotland site has been live since before 2000, when Joe Latham compiled much of the content. There was a front page which linked to a section about Quakers, pages for each Local Meeting and Area Meeting in Scotland, and pages about General Meeting and its business. Items of news and Scottish Friend were posted. In 2007 we moved to a Content Management System (CMS) called Drupal, which allows the web manager, the GM administrator and designated Friends in LM and AMs to log in and create and edit content. The site shares a server rented by David Sterratt and a friend of his from Bytemark in York. David Sterratt has dealt with the technical side of the site, e.g. dealing with software upgrades and implementing page templates. GM-appointed web managers Neil Turner (~2006-2012) and Peter Kennedy (2013-2015) have edited the site, and helped LM and AM editors with their work.

Over the years the site has evolved gradually, lead by the needs and requests of the web manager, the GM administrator and the page editors. Neil Turner produced a clickable map of meetings on our "Find a Meeting" page. There is now a neat way of posting and archiving PDF versions of newsletters on meeting pages (see, for example, South Edinburgh's entertaining newsletter – and you may be reading this edition of *Scottish Friend* from the GM page). Events, announcements, documents and minutes can all be posted to LM and AM pages too. Adding an image to an LM page has also been made easier. A few years ago we changed the design, with a cleaner front page and a design that works better on small devices (tablets and phones) than the old design did. At the end of last year we added an "Our work" page to describe our Parliamentary Engagement work, which Mairi Campbell-Jack carries out on our behalf, and this now carries Mairi's twitter stream and news items.

Room for improvement

Yet there are still "many shortcomings". At the first meeting of the Steering Group the main points raised were:

- Overall, the site could be more welcoming.

- The visual design now looks old-fashioned, especially in comparison to the revamped BYM site – one description was "dour … and Quakerly?" There are few eye-catching photographs on the site. A number of members of the group were keen to use the BYM "Q" logo, though we are not in unity on this.

- The text could do with reworking: the introductory text is not as welcoming as it could be and the "About Quakers" text needs reviewing, especially in light of what is on the updated BYM pages.

- It might be possible to improve the layout of the information: For example, some AMs and LMs would like to have more prominent pages, not buried under the "Quakers in Scotland" banner.

What next?

We are aiming towards producing a trial website later in the year, which Friends in Scotland can comment on for a period of around 6 weeks. We'll then produce a final new design in the light of these comments. In order to produce the trial website, we will address the following questions:

- Who is the site for? Enquirers, new Friends, old Friends, people interested in Quaker history, all of the above?

- How does the QuakerScotland site relate to the BYM website?

- What content do we need? e.g. Information about Quakerism, news about parliamentary and other Scottish Quaker work, events etc.

- How should the information be organised?

- What should the visual design of the site look like?

- How do Friends use the site for "internal" information, i.e. information that is of less interest to enquirers, and which we may not wish to broadcast on the Internet? Is there demand for password-protected areas of the site for this information?

We don't want to reinvent the wheel, so we'll also be looking at other Quaker AM and LM websites, as well as the Friends in Wales website, and talking with the BYM website team. Right now, we are doing an accessibility audit of the current site, and analysing the logs to see who is using the site, and how.

How can you help?

We're not going to please all Friends in Scotland, but your views will be helpful. Is there information that you think should exist on the site that you can't find? Is there another Quaker website whose design appeals to you? If you imagine yourself as a newcomer to Quakerism, how was the journey through the various Quaker websites? Please let the group know by emailing GM Administrator Marion Sharkey <scotfriends@gmail.com>. We'll post notes of our meetings on the QuakerScotland website.

GM Website Development Steering Group: Chris Booth (South East Scotland AM), Ruth Bacon (West of Scotland AM), Martin McCaffery (East Scotland AM), Clive Potter (North Scotland AM), Marion Sharkey (GM Administrator), David Sterratt (GM Web manager).