**RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS):**

**GENERAL MEETING FOR SCOTLAND**

***(Scottish Charity Number SC 012281)***

**Report for the year ended 31st December 2023**

**OFFICE BEARERS**

During 2023 and at the time of the report:

Michael Hutchinson (Clerk)

Susan Mitchell (Assistant Clerk)

Katrina McCrea (Treasurer)

**ADMINISTRATOR AND PRINCIPAL OFFICE**

Until August 2023

Sue Proudlove,

Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House,

7, Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh, EH1 2JL

Since September 2023 and at the time of the report:

Jane Booth

West Haybogs

Tough

Alford AB33 8DU

07747 396456

Email ScotFriends@gmail.com

Website www.quakerscotland.org

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINER OF THE ACCOUNTS**

Chris Holman

43a Brunstane Road South

Edinburgh EH15 2NQ

**BANKERS**

The Co-operative Bank

Triodos Bank

**TRUSTEES**

During 2023 and at the time of the report:

Robin Waterston (Clerk)

Katrina McCrea (Treasurer)

Andrew Blackadder

Malcolm Crosby

NOTE 1: This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

*NOTE 2: In this report “the General Meeting” means General Meeting for Scotland, “the Society” means the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and “the Yearly Meeting” means the Yearly Meeting of the Society in Britain (Britain Yearly Meeting). “Attenders” are persons who are associated with a Local Meeting for Worship, but who are not in formal membership of the Society.*

1. **The Organisation of the General Meeting**

The General Meeting is a constituent part of Britain Yearly Meeting which is the governing body of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain. The Membership of the General Meeting consists of those having Membership in the four Scottish Area Meetings of the Society. The Area Meeting is the basic business unit in the Society, dealing with membership, marriages, pastoral care and property. The General Meeting normally meets four times each year in different parts of Scotland enabling participation physically or by video linking.

1. **The Objectives of the General Meeting**

The General Meeting has national responsibilities on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting to represent and advance the life and witness of Quakers in Scotland. The General Meeting shares the basic aims of the Society as a church, promoting its spiritual insights and looking after the interests and welfare of its members. It provides both a policy-making forum for the Society in Scotland and a focus for the consideration of issues of concern and importance to the Society in Scotland.

The General Meeting represents the Society in Scotland to the other Churches and other faiths, and to the Scottish Government and some other Scottish organisations.

1. **Administration**

**Foundation** There is no known founding document. The General Meeting was probably established in the latter part of the 17th century when the Society was first organised, after its beginning as a popular religious movement under the inspiration of George Fox. Its operation is governed by “*Quaker Faith and Practice*”, its Book of Discipline. As described there, General Meeting for Scotland is at all times subject to the discipline of Britain Yearly Meeting.

**Governing Document** Following changes to charities legislation in Scotland, a Governing Document was approved by the General Meeting on 10th March 2007. Since then, it has had several minor revisions.

**Office bearers** Those who serve the General Meeting are normally appointed for (renewable) three-year periods. There are three office bearers: Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Treasurer.

**Other committees** **and posts** The Nominations Committee brings forward nominations for various posts and the General Meeting makes the appointments. The Parliamentary Engagement Working Group attends to the GM’s engagement with political Issues, with the main focus being on providing guidance for the work of the Parliamentary Engagement Officer. The Children and Young People representative coordinates activities involving Children and Young People, and this includes weekends for teenagers and families. In June 2021 a new Scottish Quaker Community Justice Working Group started its work.

In September 2023 a group called Quakers in Scotland Coordinating Group was set up to continue previous work on simplifying the organisation of Quaker activity in Scotland. The group was asked initially to provide information on moving to a single charity and do preparatory work on how the Area Meeting structure might evolve. Further discussions will take place in 2024.

Normally six trustees, including the General Meeting treasurer *ex officio*, serve the General Meeting. Trustees receive no remuneration. Trustees serve renewable three-year terms and are appointed by the whole General Meeting upon nomination by the Nominations Committee.

**Taking decisions** The Society regards its meetings for business as being held under the guidance of God. It believes that, when the meeting takes place in a spirit of worship, God’s will for the meeting can be discerned without the need for divisive voting. The Clerk presents each item of business to the meeting and, after Friends have been heard, and when it seems likely that the meeting has reached unity, the Clerk presents a draft Minute. This may be accepted at once or can be amended until those present can unite with it. The Minutes are thus approved by the meeting at which they are made.

1. **Financial Review of 2023**

The major source of income is contributions from the constituent Area Meetings through a quota system. In addition, a grant of £8000 was received from Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) towards the tasks laid upon GM in Section 5.03 of *Quaker faith & practice.* We continued to contribute £4000 towards the cost of the Parliamentary Engagement Officer post in 2023 as part of the £10,000 contribution to BYM made by Friends in Scotland via GM (AMs contributing £6000).

GM is supported by a part-time Administrative Officer. Sue Proudlove resigned in August 2023 and Jane Booth took up post in September 2023. The salary is paid from the General Meeting’s funds. We printed a book of Members and Attenders in 2023 with the next planned for 2025.

GM does not have a primary role as a grant-making organisation. It exists both to support Quaker initiatives and to facilitate Quaker participation in ecumenical and interfaith activities in Scotland. Our policy is to offer financial support primarily to organisations with which we have some direct involvement via appointed representatives or membership.

We had only one restricted fund, namely, Fund for Healing**.** As thefund was little used, it was agreed to donate the balance of £1,627.42 to the Friends Fellowship of Healing. They have confirmed that they will set up a restricted fund for the benefit of Friends in Scotland.

Income during the year was £31,285.44 and expenditure was £35,687.65 leaving a deficit of £4,402.21.

When General Meeting reviewed its reserves policy in 2011, the agreement was that the reserves should be equivalent to not less than 6 months expenditure. GM’s overall balance at the end of the year was £43,485.83, more than the reserve policy requirements (c. £18,000). Trustees reviewed the situation in 2023 and as Quakers in Scotland are going through a major structural organisational review, it was agreed that additional funding could be required to support this process so the level of reserve can be justified.

# 5. Review of Activities during the year

1. Meetings of General Meeting itself

We held four business meetings during 2023. Regular business items include reports and consideration of a large variety of charitable endeavours within Scotland, especially those with which the General Meeting has a special relationship (for example, through an appointed trustee or other representative).

Most meetings included a focus on one or two topics in more detail. These covered: March - revision of our policy on safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, and reflecting on how our Quaker communities are sustaining us and being sustained; June - how we can be engaged in the work of the Quaker Truth and Integrity Group, and how we proceed on the issue of simplifying our organisation; September - setting up the Quakers in Scotland Coordinating Group , and considering our parliamentary work on peace building and on climate justice; November - consideration of priorities in 2024 for the Local Development Worker, and receipt of reports from those working with our young people and from our Parliamentary Engagement Officer Sarah Komashko.

1. Other meetings of Scottish Friends supported by GM

A Quaker teenager link weekend occurred in the spring face-to-face as did the very popular residential Families Weekend in the summer. Young Friends from Scotland participated in the annual Summer Shindig residential event (organised by the Northern Friends Youth Events Trust).

1. Parliamentary Engagement Work

The Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG) comprises 8 Quakers from across Scotland, two from each of four Area Meetings. The Group works with the Parliamentary Engagement Officer (PEO); our PEO, Andrew Tomlinson, left us in February to join Christian Aid and we were delighted to welcome Sarah Komashko as his successor in July. Our aim is to build connections with our elected representatives in Scotland and to foster ongoing conversations with Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and the Scottish Government. The Group’s priorities, currently Climate Justice, Economic Justice and Peace Building, are set every three years by General Meeting for Scotland.

Highlights of 2023 for the PEWG were:

* **Peace Education – September 2023:** facilitating a performance in the Scottish Parliament of song and dance by a Glasgow Primary School class on the theme of Wangari’s Trees for Peace, the story of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and of Wangari Maathai who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. This lunchtime event was followed up with a Peace Education exhibition in the Parliament for three days showcasing Quaker work promoting and facilitating work in schools designed to embed cultures of respect and conflict resolution by giving children and students from primary age onwards some of the skills and ways of thinking which help lead to confident, peaceful outcomes.
* **Climate Justice:** we work closely with Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) on this topic. The Quaker focus is on the “Loss and Damage “and “Make Polluters Pay” campaigns highlighting the inherent injustice entwined within the climate emergency whereby countries suffering the worst catastrophes are mostly those least able to recover and who have contributed the least carbon emissions which created the crisis. Justice requires that the heaviest carbon emitters, i.e. the polluters, be required to meet their fair share of the cost of the damage wreaked by their pollution. Through SCCS we gain insight into Government “Net Zero” policy across the spectrum. We responded to the Government consultation in the autumn on its proposed Strategy for Energy and the Just Transition.
* **Time for Reflection:** when the Scottish Parliament is sitting, each week’s business is opened on a Tuesday with Time for Reflection. This is an opportunity for a citizen of any faith or none to offer a short reflection to MSPs in the Chamber about their faith, their personal life, an aspect of life. Two Scottish Quakers delivered reflections during the year. One asked “Are we being good ancestors?”, highlighted the Quaker testimony of Simplicity and emphasised the link between poor health and the climate crisis. This led directly to our facilitating an event for MSPs in March 24 showing that many of the actions required to cut carbon emissions will have significant benefits for our health and healthcare services. The second reflection discussed the nature of peace, the Quaker Peace Testimony and how peace can be fostered in ourselves as individuals, and within society as a whole. Peace is so much more than “the absence of conflict”. We hope that similar opportunities to offer reflections will arise each year.

The PEWG is small and aims to work with allies who are pursuing similar goals. Two important examples are SCCS and Christian Aid in the field of Climate Justice. The goal is to influence decision-making and change over time, to shift the social and political sphere bit by bit in the direction of Quaker testimonies of Peace, Equality, Simplicity and Truth & Integrity. We respond to the political agenda of the day, but the work is long term, guided by our values. We look to see where we can offer a distinctively Quaker voice.

General Meeting re-confirmed the areas of focus of the PEWG in November to be climate justice, economic justice and peace-building. This work is often undertaken alongside other groups in civil society who hold similar ambitions. For example, our work on the climate emergency is largely achieved working in partnership with and through our membership of SCCS, a coalition of some 60 organisations campaigning in this field.

1. Administrative support

Sue Proudlove served as administrator for General Meeting until August 2023, being employed for eight hours a week to support the work of office-holders and Scottish Friends generally. From September 2023 Jane Booth served in this post.

1. Representation on other bodies

We continued to support representatives on a variety of Scottish bodies including ACTS, Faiths in Scotland Community Action Fund, Northern Friends Youth Events Trust, the Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre and others.

**6. Future Intentions**

Since May 2021, we have had a Local Development Worker in Scotland, Zoe Prosser, employed by Britain Yearly Meeting. She has assisted in strengthening our community of Quakers in Scotland during 2023. In 2024 she will continue in this role.

A significant task before GM in 2024 will be considering proposals from QiSCG on how to simplify our structures, while sustaining our spiritual community and witness on matters of social and political concern.

**7. Connected Bodies and Transactions between them**

Apart from the constituent Quaker Meetings and Britain Yearly Meeting, there is no other connected body.

**8. Approval of Report and authority to Sign**

This Report was approved by the trustees on 9th May 2024; it was signed on their behalf by Robin Waterston, Clerk to the Trustees:



Robin Waterston