

Meeting House Matters notes (ongoing)

An ongoing record of the notes taken at online Meeting House Matters meetings.



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Archive of notes

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About these notes

The notes in this document were taken during a Meeting House Matters discussion. They are taken by those present and shared to try to help us all get a flavour of the conversations that took place. There is a small amount of editing to get them into this form for the follow-up notes. They may not be entirely accurate but serve as close a record of what was shared during the time together.

There may be times when the views expressed are of individual's and not quite the same as the view of Quakers in Britain.

Please get in touch with us if there is anything that has been shared that you think should be edited or removed.

Contact details

Ollie Waterhouse

oliverw@quaker.org.uk | www.quaker.org.uk/trustees | [020 7663 1007](tel:02076631007)

22 March 2024 – Animals in our premises

This week's session was looking at animals in our venues. Are animals welcome to come to worship? What is the definition of assistance animals or those that are there to help a person's wellbeing? How do we balance the need of the person needing the assistance animal and the needs of the rest of the community? What wildlife is welcome and what is a pest?

The next online Meeting House Matters session will be on Tuesday, 16 April in person at . The topic is yet to be confirmed. The joining details are below and will be sent around a few days before the meeting.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=aYxukeWCrw0Z80E9OuxluJuZvXr8do.1>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: MHM-online

In person events in 2024

- Tuesday, 16 April at Bradford on Avon LM
- Tuesday, 25 June at Lancaster LM
- Tuesday, 19 November at a venue in South East England, to be confirmed

<https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-24/>

Notes

We talked about animals this week. Whether they are welcome to come in our premises joining worship or if hirers are welcome to bring them. Or if we have decided that they are not welcome, unless they are a support animal. And we also thought about wildlife that could be considered pests.

We heard that the following animals have been present in our premises:

Rats	Dogs	Squirrels	Wasps	Chickens
Toads	Cats	Bats	Ants	Bees

Assistance Dogs

We attempted to watch this the film on the Assistance Dogs website, <https://www.assistedogs.org.uk/>, which talks about the different types of support that dogs can offer, see the resources section later in the document.

Animals in meeting

- One person was very nervous and brought a small animal into worship to stroke to help her in worship. The problems were the distraction to other people, especially children and the mess the animal made.
- There were various stories of animals in worship that had made their way into areas that were not suitable such as kitchens. Sometimes their owners find it hard to understand why that isn't appropriate which can be tricky.

- Homeless people can often need a pet for emotional support. Should homeless people be allowed to bring their pet into the meeting house?
- Story of a dog that whimpered though MfW and people found that difficult. Whose responsibility is it to deal with this? Eldership? Pastoral carers? Warden?
- Can be very complex as there is often emotional connection with an animal involved.
- Lone worker who had a dog that accompanied them around the meeting. A small child was frightened of dogs and so asked for the dog not to be in worship. Even if a dog is not aggressive it can still be frightening for someone who is scared of dogs!

What have we done about these situations?

- No policies in the AM as far as aware. People occasionally bring an animal but they tend to drift away to other meetings.
- Bath LM were about to sell the MH. Had three dogs regularly attending MfW which were all well behaved. Asked Bradford on Avon if dogs could come there in case their new rented premises would not welcome them?
- A hirer was allergic to pets, but elders felt this was okay as there was not a cross over in rooms and times.
- Once you have a policy (no dogs) people tend not to question. Would you take this animal to the library / hospital could be a helpful question in making a decision.
- Are the right people making the policies? Could the policy decision be affected if there is someone who really loves or dislikes dogs or other animals is involved?
- What does saying yes to one person open up to if there is not a clear policy. It may be the right decision but may be worth assuming that other people might wish to bring an animal if they know it is possible.
- Café opening in the foyer of Edinburgh MH? Café owners have asked about dogs to come into the café.

Pest or not?

- Swarm of Bees around the wardens flat. Quite a few local beekeepers who were able to come and get the swarm away.
- Rats, Ants, mice, baby frogs. Looked to see why they were coming in and tried to get rid of the reasons. Care over cleaning after baking etc.
- Lots of takeaways nearby and people ignore the bins that are provided. So often there are animals.
- Called a pest person and they helped to find where the rats were entering the building. These were blocked and there has never been a problem since or need for poisoning.
- Bats trying to roost. Bats are protected so you can't just block their access without permission. Local council is where to ask for permission.
- Pigeons and solar panels. They can get underneath and nest which can be a fire hazard. May need to get netting or something to stop birds getting underneath. Their waste can clog the gutters.

Quaker meeting houses as community centres

- Garden and the wildlife in the garden helped to connect with the community around the meeting house.
- Could a Quaker hub be an option so that there is a Quaker presence in a locality even if there is not a worshipping community?
- Could Quakers work in collaboration to have community buildings that would not just be a Quaker building but could be a shared resource?
- Can we move away from 'we've got a meeting house' to 'we have a community space and a place to meet'.
- Meeting house that is no longer being used for regular worship. Can it be used for anything else or does that mean it is outside of its usefulness?

Resources section

Assistance Dogs

Assistance Dogs UK – ADUK, resources available at,
<https://www.assistedogs.org.uk/aduk-quick-guides-and-resources/>

The Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (NI) require that disabled people have the same rights to services such as accommodation, restaurants, pubs and cafes as everyone else.

The Equalities Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (NI) say that reasonable adjustments must be made in order to avoid discriminating against disabled people.

These reasonable adjustments will range from creating an access route for a person with a wheelchair to modifying a “no dog’s policy” in order that a disabled person may be accompanied by their assistance dog.

Assistance dogs trained by ADUK member organisations perform practical assistive tasks for their disabled partners or alert to life-threatening medical conditions to enable their owners to be independent.

For this reason, it is reasonable to allow assistance dogs to accompany their owners into most situations where pet dogs would not be permitted, or for service providers to make reasonable adjustments in providing safe and secure accommodation for a dog and support for its handler in the dog’s absence, in, for example, an infection control clinical setting.

A disabled person should not be put at a disadvantage due to their assistance dog. For example, a disabled person should not be asked to sit in a specific area to keep the dog out of the way or asked to pay an additional fee for cleaning.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have produced a guide that informs businesses of their legal obligation to allow access to assistance dogs.

- Assistance dogs: A guide for all businesses | EHRC
(www.equalityhumanrights.com)

Assistance dogs are also trained to help people with hearing difficulties, epilepsy, diabetes, physical mobility problems and more. Assistance dogs carry out a variety

of practical tasks for people as well as supporting their independence and confidence.

Assistance dogs are not pets. They are treated as 'auxiliary aids'.

An 'auxiliary aid' is anything which provides additional support or assistance to a disabled person.

Most assistance dogs are likely to be highly trained. This means that they:

- will not wander freely around the premises
- will sit or lie quietly on the floor next to their owner
- are unlikely to foul in a public place

Most are instantly recognisable by a harness or jacket. However, the law does not require the dog to wear a harness or jacket to identify it as an assistance dog.

Some, but not all assistance dog users, will carry an ID book giving information about the assistance dog and the training organisation together with other useful information. Again, this is not a legal requirement and assistance dog users should not be refused a service simply because they do not possess an ID book.

Assistance dogs can also be owner-trained. The owner selects their own dog to fit their own requirements.

Support dogs

Emotional support dogs, meanwhile, don't require any official training and don't have specific tasks to fulfill. As Dr Ellen Hendriksen, clinical psychologist at Boston University's Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders puts it, "Service animals do, while emotional support animals are."

Dr. Hendriksen adds, "Emotional support animals help simply by being there. They don't undergo any specific training because their presence, in and of itself, is comforting to someone suffering from anxiety, depression, or another mental or physical illness."

Lastly, therapy dogs are trained to provide comfort and affection in hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, and other such settings. They are brought into a facility by a handler and taken away at the end of a session – unlike emotional support dogs, which are live-in pets helping one person.

13 February 2024 – Balancing the needs of Quakers and the needs of hirers

This week's session was looking at how to find the balance between the needs of the Quaker community and the needs of hirers.

The next online Meeting House Matters session will be on Friday, 22 March 10.30am. The topic is yet to be confirmed. The joining details are below and will be sent around a few days before the meeting.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=aYxukeWCrw0Z80E9OuxluJuZvXr8do.1>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: MHM-online

In person events in 2024

- Tuesday, 16 April at Bradford on Avon LM
- Tuesday, 25 June at Lancaster LM
- Tuesday, 19 November at a venue in South East England, to be confirmed

<https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-24/>

Notes

The notes below were taken during the online session and are relevant to the Quaker communities that were represented. They may not apply to all Quaker communities and the lists may not be exhaustive.

What do Quakers need?

- A decent size room that can seat up to 50 people.
- Having a social space as well as a good-sized meeting room.
- Need to feel as though it is their building:
 - In terms of responsibility
 - In terms of access
- To know what the building is for and how its use fits with the purposes of the Quaker community.
- Does it need a designated quiet room or space that Quaker committees or groups can always have available??
- A display space specifically for Quakers.
- Flexibility to use the space but not assume it can be used at the drop of a hat.
- Very clear boundaries and expectations of how the building is used.
- Storage, Quakers need to have clear expectations about what can be stored by the meeting and individual Friends.
- Ticking clocks – can be a comfort but can also cause sensitivity.
- Quality tea and coffee.
- Needs a room that is quiet and clean.
- The place for worship needs to be accessible.

What do hirers need?

- Clean, tidy, presentable, good temperature.
- Boundaries, need to know what they can and can't do.
- Timely invoicing and other admin.
- Efficient response to enquiries so they feel they are being listened to.
- Level of flexibility, especially for long-term hirers to change at short notice in an emergency. Works both ways when Quakers require spaces at short notice.
- To build a relationship built with the people who manage and run the meeting house.
- To be treated fairly.
- That everything works as it is meant to.
- A good welcome.
- Up-to-date information.
- A sense of ownership of the building, within clear agreed boundaries.
- Safety, security.

Practical requirements:

- Good wifi.
- Storage.
- More power-points than are available.
- Screens and projectors.
- Flip-charts / whiteboards.
- Refreshments or the ability to make their own.

What are the challenges?

- Conflict of running a meeting house as a small business.
- Administrative pressure on few people in the Quaker meeting.
- Relationships with the Quaker community, often too many people in the Quaker community making requests of those running the premises.
- Negotiating between people who want tech and those who want no tech at all.
- Trying to be ecological against being cost efficient.
- Clashing bookings – monthly Quaker lunch session which clashed with the busiest day of the week.
- Are there ways that we can accommodate things that are important to another group or hirer? E.g. another faith group wanting to use the space on a Sunday.
- Lots of quiet groups, and also have noisier groups. Balancing who is in the building to ensure that the use is compatible.
- Ensuring that parts of the building permanently rented are not affected by occasional users.

Tips and techniques

- Piano always seems to be in the wrong room, so fitted it with decent soft wheels so that it can be moved easily.
- Knowing how the building works and being able to negotiate.
- Find the humour as best possible in all situations.

- Add the Meeting Zoom account as an extra room in the calendar or booking system.
- Expect that people won't read the paperwork or the signs, find other ways to help users understand what they have agreed to. Walk through everything every time or on a regular basis.
- If use Hallmaster, have an extra room with details of the facilities etc.

Communication:

- Clear communication but with creativity. Knowing the audience and speak with clarity.
- Regular check in with Quakers, identify key role holders or those who book most regularly.
- List of people in the meeting and what their responsibilities are officially and unofficially.
- Hirer email address on the newsletter.
- Keep an eye on the calendar and ensure that rooms are booked appropriately.
- Visible signage, not necessarily with words, think of people whose first language is not English, people with dementia. Make signage as helpful as possible. Photo of what's in a cupboard when it is tidy?
- Handwritten notices have a more welcoming impact on people.

Are there things that hirers MUST make way for?

- Quaker celebrations: funerals, memorials where there is often little notice to arrange. More flexibility with weddings
- Regular worship.
- YFGM and other parts of formal BYM structure to hold meetings or gatherings. Bookings can be taken in plenty of time.
- AM trustees, want to meet at each LM every year, they should be able to provide adequate notice.
- Hire agreements should have a clause about making way for some Quaker activity. Primary building use is for the Quaker community.
- Hirers shouldn't feel they are being taken advantage of.
- Some meetings don't hire out the library as it has some valuable books. Quaker groups can use it if needed.
- Hirers need to know that they can't necessarily have changes made to the building or property as it may affect the way others can use the space.
- Arranging building work around hirers? Quinquennial survey. No hirers during that time?
- Closed to hirers for some time in August when work can be done and gives the meeting house staff a break!
- Negotiating with neighbours about their works so your hirers are informed if they are likely to be disruptive.

17 January 2024 – Looking back and planning ahead

This time we had a session thinking about what had happened over the last 12 months and recognising what went well and what had been difficult.

We then spent some time thinking about what we have that is already planned in 2024 in our work and in the life of our Quaker communities. We thought about things that we know about or that we think might make our work more difficult that we have planned. And we looked at what is giving us joy in our work in 2024.

The next online Meeting House Matters session will be on Tuesday, 13 February 11am. The topic is yet to be confirmed. The joining details are below and will be sent around a few days before the meeting.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=aYxukeWCrw0Z80E9OuxluJuZvXr8do.1>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: MHM-online

In person events in 2024

The days for the in person events in 2024 are as follows:

- Tuesday, 16 April at Bradford on Avon LM
- Tuesday, 25 June at Lancaster LM
- Tuesday, 19 November at a venue in South East England, to be confirmed

The booking form for the events is now available and there will be an update about the final venue in plenty of time before the events take place. Use the link to the booking form below to register.

<https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-24/>

Notes

Looking backwards

What have we done over the past year? What were the joys? What were the challenges?

Joys

- For most income from lettings has recovered and in a few cases is above the level than it was pre-pandemic.
- In some places finding there are other venues closing and the MH has picked up new business.
- Building works have been completed, such as a new side door at Bradford on Avon LM. This has sorted drafts and problems that there were with flooding.
- Opening new rooms in the building.
- Many children come through the building on a weekly basis which is a good outreach opportunity.
- Some thinking has started on how the building can serve the community better/more that it currently does.

- Have found that some hirer groups cross over and so they do things to help each other.
- Trying new things out to try to bring new business to the meeting house.

Challenges

- There are still pockets of the country where recovery is slow or not coming back to where things were before 2020. One person said that hire levels are still only at 50% of what they were.
- Challenges around room bookings as a response to the Israel-Gaza War with organisations whose values may not align fully with Quakers.

Looking forward

Joys

- Having great kit in the meeting house for hirers and Quakers. Now set up so that the kit is plug-and-play with users laptops.
- Wifi access points now throughout the building strengthening the signal.
- Café at Central Edinburgh Meeting House.
- Have some children back in the meeting but realised the space is quite dull. Have done some work to make the space more exciting for them.
- Local artist has done a mural to cover a very dull space at one side of the meeting house. (In some areas where there is a regeneration schemes as these might provide financial opportunities)
- Got a school come in and it was lovely and they were very interested and attentive and they had a mini meeting for worship.

Challenges

- Keeping room hire charges equitable and in line with similar venues in the locality.
- Keeping up with tech changes both for worship and hirers. Ensuring that hirers and Quakers have what is needed for their activities!
- Meeting Houses are often good for either hirers of Quakers. How can that balance be changed so that our buildings work well for all who use them?
- Working on upgrading the accessibility of the meeting house.
- Can the main space be made brighter and more inviting. Necessary for encouraging hirers to come into the space?
- Trying to get solar panel onto the roof, practical issues are mounting and a big challenge.

Other topics

Solar panels

- Is your building in a conservation area or listed? There are rules on panels but they are allowed and have just been changed a bit. See, <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/climate-change-historic-building-adaptation-consultation/>
- Businesses have different rules about the number of panels than domestic properties do, but you can apply to have more panels through planning.

Schools

- Invited a school to come and gave a guided tour of the building with a walk round the garden which included a brief talk about Quakers.
- Held a short meeting for worship and invited one child to elder with a local Friend.
- Afterwards the teacher sent a powerpoint presentation about what they had learned.
- Peer mediation training happens at Horfield LM bringing lots of young people to the venue! Great for outreach.
- Visits with a quiz about Quakers and chocolate have often been popular.
- Engaging with Schools pack from BYM is available from BYM, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/engagingschoolsforweb>.
- Other education resources can be found on the website, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/peace-education>.

George Fox 400

- BYM has advertised a short-term post to find ways to celebrate GF 400, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/jobs/jobs>.
- George Fox birthday party celebration at Yearly Meeting and at a Quaker meeting house near you.
- George Fox paper doll available from Bunhill Fields Mtg, <https://bunhillquakers.org.uk/history>.
- Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) has activities on its website, <https://fwcc.world/fox>.

General election

- Big issues are ones other than ones that Quakers might like to have the election more focused around.
- Elections guidance for meetings, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/guidance-for-quakers-uk-general-election-2024>.
- And the BYM Political Engagement webpage, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/politicalengagement>.
- Try to bring the issues that are important to Quakers to the fore.
- <https://mindfulbusinessservices.com/political-policies>