Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

April 2023 (online version)

No. 403

Meetings for Worship

Every Sunday 10:15am at the Abingdon Community Support Service (Abbey Centre), Crabtree Place, off Audlett Drive.

Thursday 6th April 7:30pm in the Garden Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street.

Quakers In 17th-Century Appleton

Rosie Page has a keen interest in local history. Studying the maps in 'An Historical Atlas of Berkshire' showing trends in religious practice in 1669, she noticed that the parishes on the high ground above the River Thames between Cumnor and Faringdon had a far greater proportion of non-conformists than other parts of the county. This prompted her to find out about early Quakers in her home village of Appleton. The article below is an abridgement of a more substantial account written by Rosie.

Early Quakers in Appleton

Quaker preachers from Cumbria arrived in Oxford in 1654 and seem to have found ready hearers in the villages of the Vale of the White Horse. One early convert was Oliver Sansom of Boxford and Charney Bassett, who was a prosperous, educated farmer with other business interests. Oliver, his wife Jane and other members of her family formed the core of a Quaker worshipping community that spread to other villages in the area.

The first mention of Quaker activity in Appleton comes in 1660. A prominent name is that of Walter Wightwick, a yeoman and a gentleman who lived at Quarrelstead Manor (which no longer exists). For years the First Day Meeting was held at the Wightwick family's house.

Numbers grow and a meeting place is found In January 1677,

'Mention was made by some Appleton friends desiring a weekly meeting and being seriously debated among friends it was at last concluded that every third day of the week they are to keep a weekly meeting at Simon Battin's house.'¹

The Battins were an old-established Appleton family. Also in 1677 a Monthly Meeting at the Battin house agreed that 'Katherine Koomber shall have given her 2s and 2d for her pains in sweeping the meeting house and buying of broomes'.

A later enthusiasm to meet twice a week suggests that the group was thriving. Indeed, a census held in 1676 reckoned that 22% of Appleton's population were dissenters, higher than any other village in the area except West Challow. Indeed, Appleton Quakers seem to have been most

¹ Quotations, together with much of the material for this article, are taken from the minute books of the Vale of the White Horse Monthly Meetings from 1673 to 1727. These are kept in the Oxfordshire History Centre.

numerous from the 1660s to 1680s: that is, between the 1662 Act of Parliament aimed at discouraging Quakers and other sects, and the Act of Toleration in 1689, which allowed freedom of worship.

Concerns of the Quaker community

Monthly Meetings were held regularly in Appleton in the 1670s. Business was more pastoral than spiritual, and a big preoccupation was marriage. There was strong pressure to find a partner within the Quaker community, and the social nature of monthly meetings, bringing together people from the whole of the Vale of the White Horse, seems to have been conducive to romance — or at least to suitable attachments.

Several minutes concern the support of members in need; for example:

'Agreed that a public collection should be made for John Atkinson a friend belonging to Lambourne meeting who sustained a great loss lately by fire.'

'Richard Allin's wife given 7s. towards buying her twins some coats, it being pretty hard with them being five young children and but one man's labour to maintain them.'

The sick were visited:

'Oct 22nd 1683: Appointed Joan Newman the elder to visit the widow White of Sandford who hath been sick and weakly of late, and to give an account of how it is with her.'

Death was another area where Quakers found themselves needing to follow different practices from other villagers. Faringdon established a Quaker burial ground in 1673 and it is recorded that in June 1682 one Richard White of Appleton was to be interred there.

Gaol was a constant hazard for Quakers. Oliver Sansom, a frequent visitor to Appleton and possibly the inspiration behind the Meeting, was in and out of Reading Gaol regularly, and Paul Newman of Appleton is described in a list of dissenters compiled in 1676 as a 'schoolmaster, when not in gaol'.

The decline of the Appleton Quaker community

Meetings for worship continued at Simon Battin's house, but things were changing. Third Day meeting was moved to Fourth Day and began to be shared week and week about with Abingdon. Monthly Meetings in Appleton dwindled during the 1680s (when Uffington, Challow and Faringdon became more usual venues) and ceased altogether in 1693. Eventually in 1697 the First Day meeting, by now only every other week, also moved to Abingdon, where Friends began to construct a regular meeting house in Ock Street.

It is possible that Oliver Sansom, who had been so supportive of village meetings, began to concern himself more with building congregations in Abingdon and Faringdon, where he now lived. His influence may have waned as the original stalwarts of Appleton Meeting aged and died. The drawbacks of following the Quaker testimonies will have increasingly made themselves felt, especially the refusal to swear oaths which barred men from taking public office. Young people who had been born into Quaker families but had not made the commitment themselves were less willing to be bound by restrictions imposed on them, however lovingly. The equality of women was a stumbling block and became a big issue in parts of Berkshire in the 1680s.

Then there was the alternative of joining other dissenting churches which allowed the taking of oaths and paying of tithes, an alternative that was therefore less likely to result in imprisonment and poverty. The Baptists continued to grow locally, and by 1851 attendances at Appleton's Anglican parish church and at the non-conformist chapel were about equal. Dissent did not go

away, but these factors put together seem to have spelt the end of Appleton's brief eminence as a centre of Quakerism.



Aerial view of St Laurence's Church and Appleton Manor today. Both buildings would have been known to the early Quakers, although they have since been altered.

'Quaker Meeting' by Beryl Davidson

It seems appropriate to follow Rosie's account with a poem, written by our late Friend Beryl Davidson, that captures the essence of a modern-day Quaker Meeting in just a few short lines. Originally published in our newsletter some years ago, the poem was read aloud at Beryl's funeral on 28th March, which a number of Abingdon Friends attended.

A tabletop touched by sunlight, A vase of flowers making shadows, Perfume of hyacinth scenting the silence, Time stilled in the mind like quiet water, Careful words making ripples, Like scraps for fish to feed on, Silence returning, revealing The reality that God is. Friends listening to the still small voice That the world shouts too loud to hear.

Quakers in Criminal Justice Conference, 24th–26th February

From Jenny Carr:

This year's QICJ Conference took place at Hinsley Hall, Leeds. Originally a Wesleyan College and later a nunnery, it retains a calm, spiritual atmosphere. The theme of the conference was 'Prejudice and Disadvantage: Groups Over-Represented in the Criminal Justice System.' There were about 40 participants, all with some sort of interest in criminal justice.

Making Sense of Sentencing: Doing Justice to Both Victim and Prisoner The opening talk was given by the Right Reverend James Jones, former Bishop for Prisons, chair of the Independent Commission into the Experience of Victims and Long-Term Prisoners, and chair of the Hillsborough Independent Panel. He is the author of a number of books, and his radio programme 'The Bishop and the Prisoner' is available on BBC Sounds.

James began by saying how much he had been looking forward to being with us as our presence would refresh his soul. This attitude reflects a man who is committed to making a positive difference.

James questioned whether prisons are warehouses to store the incorrigible or places to restore and rehabilitate. Over the last decade, the number of sentences of 10 years or more has nearly trebled. There is a need to focus on justice and protection as well as on punishment, and to progress to how people can be reformed. Sentencing must shift from length to content, in order for offenders to be less dangerous on their release.

Sentences do justice to neither the offender nor the victims, who feel keenly that they are merely onlookers rather than core participants. No single person is in charge of the victim's experience as they progress through the criminal justice system, leading to further traumatisation. The victim's personal impact statement is allowed entirely at the judge's discretion.

James suggested that we write to our MPs and look more into the Independent Victims' Commission.

The Criminalisation of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Populations Rachel Cooper talked about her work with Leeds GATE (Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange: <u>https://www.leedsgate.co.uk/</u>), which supports Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. The organisation has three aims: campaigning, community development and advocacy.



Rachel gave us a brief history of how Romany gypsies had travelled from Northern India with other groups. She showed us a film about how the

nomadic communities had become established in this country from 1000AD onwards. The word 'Rom' means 'man' or 'husband', and the word 'Gypsies' is derived from Egypt, their place of origin. Today there are an estimated 300,000 Travellers in the UK, each community having its own language, memories and culture.

The average life expectancy of a Traveller is 50, caused in part by poor health, low levels of literacy, exclusion and unemployment. The experience of racism is widespread.

In West Yorkshire there are private sites and five dedicated local authority sites. The latter can be expensive to rent and provide poor conditions. Different lengths of stay apply on different sites, which can lead to problems with the criminal justice system. Over the years there have been various pieces of legislation. The latest — the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 — gives the authorities the power to put children into care and to impound caravans and vehicles with a release charge of £2,000. The occupants would then be considered intentionally homeless.

The proportion of Travellers in the prison population is higher than average. When I worked at HMYOI Aylesbury in the 1990s, it struck me forcibly that young men from the Traveller community were the ones who experienced the most discrimination.

Learning from the Case of David Oluwale

The third main talk was given by Max Farrar, who heads Remember David — the David Oluwale Memorial Association (<u>https://rememberoluwale.org/</u>). David Oluwale was a man failed by the criminal justice system. Born around 1930, he arrived here in 1949 from Lagos, Nigeria. He was described as a resilient and enterprising man who worked, with other West Africans, in the

unpleasant jobs that no-one else wanted to do. In 1953, David was confined to a psychiatric hospital in Leeds; when he left there in 1961, he had been broken by medication and shock treatment. He spent the next eight years sleeping rough, in and out of prison, and again incarcerated in the psychiatric hospital. In his last two years, David was systematically assaulted by two officers from the Leeds police force. He drowned in the River Aire on 18th April, 1969. The two officers who had assaulted him were imprisoned in 1971, but were acquitted of his manslaughter.



Max Farrer describes David's legacy as one of hope. The David Oluwale Memorial Association has worked with Leeds City Council and other agencies and individuals to ensure that the city can offer safety and respect for the marginalised and excluded. The charity will create a memorial garden in his name that will symbolise the best of Leeds: its creativity, its hospitality and its drive for social justice.

Workshop on Victims and Witnesses

Detective Chief Inspector Matt Hawker, West Yorkshire Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses, explained what goes behind the scenes in preparing cases and supporting witnesses. He acknowledged problems such as the backlog of cases, low numbers of prosecutions for sexual assault, differing treatments of vulnerable groups and variability in the quality of information on file. Procedural justice only works with a sense of fairness, dignity and confidence, and Matt thought that improvements could be made by promoting the values of diversity, equality and inclusion.

I asked Matt how the police were being seen now in the light of the murder of Sarah Everard by serving police officer Wayne Cousens. Matt Hawker acknowledged that it had led to a great deal of difficulties with the public.

Workshop on Older Prisoners

This workshop was run by Sue Barrance. There are now a lot of older people in prison, and they have different needs to be met. Sue went through four case studies which highlighted issues such as health problems, mental capacity, lack of family support, and the fear of disclosure and threats from social media after their release.

'Where Are We Now?'

The conference was brought to a close by Mike Nellis, who considered this question. He believes that, in these dark times, we need hope and optimism to bring about systematic change. The entrenched disfunctionality of the criminal justice system needs reform to take place in the police, legal, crown prosecution service, courts, probation, prisons and victim services. Typically, there has been underfunding, closures and cuts to services. Restorative justice remains on the margins. The fear of crime leads to public demands for a punitive approach; migrants and criminals are seen as hate figures. However, violence *per se* is not inexplicable, and early therapeutic interventions can make it less likely.

Mike considered prison abolition to be 'a horizon, a moral compass [and] an honourable hope'. Even if not all Quakers are abolitionists, he felt that there needs to be room in the Society of Friends for those who are. During the weekend, we also squeezed in time for the AGM and the ever-valuable small group meetings. Our annual QICJ Conference remains the place to go to hear interesting speakers with some different and challenging viewpoints, to meet up with old friends and make new ones, and to re-charge one's batteries.

You can find more information about the conference at <u>http://www.qicj.org/</u>

Abingdon Quaker Matters

Business Meeting: Sunday 30th April

Friends are reminded that the next business meeting takes place a week earlier than usual, after Meeting for Worship on Sunday 30th April.

Contact Information for the Meeting and Informal Groups

It has been proposed that we should collate information about the different ways for Friends to engage with Abingdon Meeting and the smaller groups associated with it. This would be given to people who are new to the Meeting, but we thought that it would also be useful to include the information in the newsletter. For convenience, you will find it on a separate page at the end of this issue, to 'cut out and keep'.

Special Appeal: Charney Manor

From Chris Sewell

April's appeal will be for the Quaker conference and retreat centre, Charney Manor, located in beautiful surroundings in Charney Bassett, near Wantage.

Friends will have recently learned of the decision to close Woodbrooke as a centre for courses and residential gatherings in support of the spiritual life of the Society. However, we can be grateful that we have our own Quaker learning centre on our doorstep in the form of Charney Manor.

Charney Manor is used by Friends for group retreats and study programmes, and is also hired out as a residential conference and training venue. Some parts of the manor house date back to the 13th century, and it is regarded as a haven of tranquillity where people from across the country can come for reflection, renewal and relaxation.

The Manor is managed by Friends and a team of staff who manage the programme of courses and events, the residential accommodation and the maintenance of the building and grounds. You can stay on a B&B or selfcatering basis and plan your own activities, or you can sign up for one of Charney Manor's short courses. These seek to nourish the spirit through silence, deep listening and an invitation to explore issues and themes with both the heart and the mind. Guided retreats are also organised. They are designed to



reflect current interests and emerging concerns amongst British Quakers, but they aim to be inclusive, meaning everyone is welcome.

The programme for 2023 is available at <u>https://www.charneymanor.com/</u> It includes a mixture of interests from meditation and yoga to poetry workshops and a very popular 'Experiencing Shakespeare' course.

We are very fortunate to have such a precious spiritual and cultural resource so close at hand. However, as with all old and beautiful buildings, the running costs are very high and contributions to support the Manor are much appreciated. Guidance on making a donation and making a Gift Aid declaration (if you are eligible) are provided on a separate sheet sent out with this newsletter.

Donations to Local Organisations

Following the discernment reached at Business Meeting on 5th March, the treasurer is pleased to inform Friends that cheques of £500 each have been sent to the Abingdon Carousel Family Centre and Abingdon Food Bank.

Examination of the Accounts

The treasurer presented the Meeting's accounts for 2022 for examination on 27th March and is awaiting formal notification that they have been approved.

Around the Area and Region

What Canst Thou Say? Reading Group

Thursday 13th April 7pm, online

This OSAM-wide group is reading and considering Janet Scott's 1980 Swarthmore Lecture ahead of the spiritual nurture session at November's Area Meeting, which Janet herself will lead. The third meeting will take place on 13th April; the Zoom room will open at 6:45pm.

Web link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6202709452?pwd=TStZS3ViWUJ10DNNSIIRdUY3QnJmZz09

Meeting ID: 620 270 9452 Passcode: 596795

From the Wider Quaker Community

Quaker Gathering in London: 'The Big One'

From Living Witness: Quakers for Sustainability On the weekend of 21st—24th April, Quakers in Britain will be gathering with other groups and organisations across Britain to give witness to our concern for climate



justice and the climate and ecological crisis. Westminster Meeting is generously hosting Quakers in Britain and is allowing its Meeting House to be used as a base. We will be able to seek support, rest and hospitality until 5pm on each day of the gathering. Friday 21st April:

- Meet at 10am Westminster Meeting House for a Meeting for Worship at 10:30am.
- We will then walk to the Foreign Office: estimated arrival time 12pm.
- Meet in St James' Park at 2pm, where we will assemble as close to Parliament Square as possible for a Meeting for Worship.

Saturday 22nd April:

• Meet at 10am in St James' Park for a Meeting for Worship at 10:30am. We will then join the Biodiversity March (feel free to dress up as a species that is endangered or now extinct).

Sunday 23rd April:

• Meet at 10am Westminster Meeting House to join their usual Meeting for Worship at 10:30am.

Monday 24th April:

- Meet at 10am Westminster Meeting house for a meeting for worship at 10:30am.
- We will then walk to Ministry of Justice. Estimated arrival time 12pm

Please consider how you or your meeting might uphold those attending the gathering in London.

For up-to-date information about the plans for the weekend please join the announcement-only WhatsApp group: <u>https://chat.whatsapp.com/JAMLIE6AcL1GC8jDRycy1u</u>

Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies Conference 2023: What's Next – and How Do We Prepare for It?

Friday 21st — Sunday 23rd April, Charney Manor and online

Charney Manor, Charney Bassett, Oxfordshire OX12 0EJ

Friends, members and supporters of the Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies are invited to join either in person or on Zoom. The event will be held at the delightful Charney Manor, and plenary sessions will be streamed on Zoom.

Presenters:

- Fee Berry: 'Beliefs about the Afterlife and How to Get There'
- Dr Roger Straughan: 'Who on Earth knows about the Afterlife?'
- Dr Mark Fox: 'Scent from Beyond? Olfaction and After-Death Communication'
- Jill Inskip: 'Approaching Death with the Afterlife in Mind' (recording)

Conference fees:

- Residential: £295 for the weekend, inclusive of refreshments, meals and accommodation, with reduced fees for one-day bookings. Places at Charney are running out; contact Fee Berry on <u>caliandris@gmail.com</u> by 10th April.
- Online: £10. Book on Eventbrite by 19th April: <u>https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/qfas-conference-2023-whats-next-and-how-do-we-prepare-for-it-tickets-592975233887</u>

Centring Down with Compassion

Centring Down with Compassion is a monthly online Meeting for Worship facilitated by Carolyn Baynes of Farnham Meeting. Each Meeting focuses on an individual Advice & Query and incorporates prepared ministry around the A&Q, centring down using a Mindfulness or other meditation technique, and small-group discussion. Meetings are held on the fourth Monday of the month in the early evening; the April meeting (on 24th) will explore A&Q 17. Previous sessions have been recorded and are available as podcasts: visit <u>https://www.mindfulfarnham.com/</u>

If you are interested in joining a session, please contact Liz Matthews.

Faith in Action in and around Abingdon

Abingdon Peace Group

The Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month, normally at the Northcourt Centre. Details of the January meeting will follow in due course. Contact <u>abingdonpeace@gmail.com</u>

Abingdon Carbon Cutters

Carbon Cutters meet on the third Wednesday of the month. Details of the January meeting will follow in due course. Visit <u>https://abingdoncarboncutters.org.uk/</u> or email <u>carbon.cutters@gmail.com</u>

Among Abingdon Friends

Poem of the Month

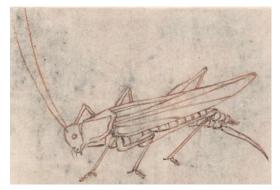
From the Poetry Group

Bees, wasps, flies, spiders (yes, we know they have eight legs), cockroaches, moths, ladybirds, headlice: we had them all that our meeting on 1st March on the theme of 'insects'. Choosing a single poem to share with the Meeting was the occasion of some head-scratching, but we eventually selected a contribution from Dorothea, which offers us two insects for the price of one, so to speak:

On the Grasshopper and the Cricket

The poetry of earth is never dead: When all the birds are faint with the hot sun, And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead; That is the Grasshopper's — he takes the lead In summer luxury, — he has never done With his delights; for when tired out with fun He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.

The poetry of earth is ceasing never: On a lone winter evening, when the frost Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever, And seems to one in drowsiness half lost, The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.



John Keats

News of Friends

Wendy Regaard recently had a fall at home. We send Wendy our love and best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Fred Sessa

Alfred 'Fred' Sessa, a long time member of our Meeting, died peacefully on 8th March in the Green Pasture Nursing Home in Banbury, surrounded by his family.

Service of Remembrance

Fred's daughter Hepzibah invites Abingdon Friends to join the family for a Meeting for Worship to remember his life at **Sibford Gower Meeting House** on **Wednesday 26th April at 2pm**. Fred will be interred with his wife Erica in the garden of the Meeting House. Refreshments will follow at the nearby Wykham Arms.

Instead of flowers, the family asks for donations in Fred's memory to be made to the Katherine House Hospice, Banbury. A donation box will be provided at the Meeting, but donations can also be sent c/o:

Edd Frost & Daughters Family Funeral Directors 14 Canada Close Banbury OX16 2RT

An Appreciation of Fred's life

Roger Baker writes:

As his daughter Hepzibah has written, Fred was an extraordinary man who led a life of humility, humour and abounding love, and will be greatly missed by all who knew him. He will be laid to rest with his wife Erica in the beautiful garden of Sibford Quaker Meeting House.

Fred declined to be interviewed for a 'Friendly Face', so here is some information gleaned from the profile of Erica compiled in 1996 and from our newsletter archive:

Fred was a teacher who came over from the States in 1965 on an exchange visit. He met Erica, and returned a year later to marry her. In 1973 he was appointed head of Wennington School, a progressive school founded by Quaker Kenneth Barnes which had fallen on difficult times. With the help of old scholars, Fred and Erica worked hard for two years before the school closed for lack of funds.

In 1975 Fred succeeded John Reader as headmaster of Great Ayton Friends' School. After ten years there they decided to take a break and moved south to be nearer their four older children. They opened a delicatessen in Abingdon High Street and lived in a 'slim slice' of a house on the south side of the High Street.

After a few years, Fred decided to return to teaching English and obtained a post at Aylesbury Grammar School. Commuting to Aylesbury was not ideal, so in 1993 they moved to Bicester. However, Fred remained loyal to Abingdon Meeting, taking on various roles: Elder, Representative on MM managing Trustees and MM rep on Meeting for Sufferings. His spoken ministry was always much appreciated.

Fred had a hip operation in 2007 which allowed him to resume playing golf. In 2008 he and Erica were back in the States renewing friendships at first hand. Fred sent a 'Letter from America' (in the

style of Alistair Cooke) for our July newsletter, commenting on the differences between life in England and the USA and the changes he noticed.

About fourteen years ago Fred and Erica moved to Banbury to be nearer their family and transferred their membership to Banbury & Evesham MM, but asked for the Abingdon newsletter to be sent so that they could remain in touch.

Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: April Rota

2nd	Alan Pearmain	Liz Matthews
9th	Rosie Page	Richard Smart
16th	Judy Goodall	Sally Reynolds
23rd	Chris Sewell	Auriel Lancashire
30th	Adrian Allsop	Liz Matthews

April Dates for Your Diary

This is a summary of the Quaker-related events announced on the preceding pages.

Date	Time	Event details
Thurs 13th	7pm	<i>What Canst Thou Say?</i> reading group Zoom
Fri 21st— Mon 24th		Quaker Gathering on Sustainability Westminster Meeting House and other venues, London
Fri 21st—Sun 23rd		Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies Conference 2023 Charney Bassett and online
Sun 30th	After MfW	Business Meeting

Next Month...

Please send your contributions for the May issue (in words and/or pictures) to the editors by **Wednesday 26th April**.

Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting <u>https://abingdonquakers.org/</u>

Clerk: Judy Goodall – <u>abingdonquakers@gmail.com</u> Newsletter Editors: Roger Baker & Liz Matthews <u>newsletter@abingdonquakers.org.uk</u>

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Abingdon Quaker Meeting: Contact Information

1st April 2023

Formal contacts General enquiries, messages to the Clerk and requests to join the general mailing list (Google group):	abingdonquakers@gmail.com
General enquiries by phone:	07564 199778
Children's Meeting:	children@abingdonquakers.org.uk
Newsletter contributions and requests to join the newsletter mailing list:	newsletter@abingdonquakers.org.uk
Treasurer:	treasurer@abingdonquakers.org.uk
Safeguarding:	safeguard@abingdonquakers.org.uk
Website co-ordinator:	web@abingdonquakers.org.uk
Informal groups within the Meeting Sunday evening reading group	Sally Reynolds
(meets in person monthly on the last Sunday):	
Friday morning reading group (meets in person or on Zoom monthly on the 4th Friday):	Kate Sewell
Poetry group (meets approximately monthly in person either in person or on Zoom; has its own mailing list):	Liz Matthews

Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting **Registered office:** Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting 43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW

01865 557373 oxswinam@quaker.org.uk

Quakers in Britain Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Friends House 173 Euston Road London NW1 2BJ

020 7663 1000 enquiries@quaker.org.uk https://quaker.org.uk

