



## **The Association of Talking Friends**

**Registered Charity no. 299656**

### **Trustees' Report for the year ended 31:12:2014**

The purpose of the Trustees' Annual Report is to highlight the activities of the charity in accordance with the aims and objectives in the Constitution.

#### ***Trustees and Committee Members***

The Constitution of the Association requires that there shall be not less than 3 Trustees:

(b) Trustees shall be appointed by Dorking and Horsham Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), (or by any body to which its functions are transferred in whole or part from time to time), from amongst persons who are and remain Members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

(c) A Trustee shall automatically resign on ceasing to be a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

(d) Persons appointed as Trustees may retire at any time of their own volition or at the request of the Appointing Body for the time being.

The following served as Trustees during 2014 (see Note 2):

|             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|
| Gill Coffin | appointed 17:07:2007 |
| Anne Austin | appointed 11:11:2012 |
| Jane Beale  | appointed 08:06:2013 |

All subscribers and readers are members of the Association of Talking Friends, and Committee members are appointed annually at its AGM, and may be re-appointed subject to their consent at the following AGM. The following served as Committee members during 2014:

|                   |                       |   |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Anne Austin       | appointed 17:07:2007  |   |
| Gillian Bryan     | appointed 15:05:2010; | Treasurer - 2014-2017 (Note 1)          |
| Alan Johnson      | appointed 17:07:2007; | Clerk of Committee - 2014-2017 (Note 1) |
| William Waddilove | appointed 17:07:2007; | Website Administrator                   |

Note 1. The Clerk and Treasurer are appointed for three years, at the first meeting of the Committee following an AGM.

Note 2. The responsibility for appointing Trustees was transferred from Dorking and Horsham to Central England Area Quaker Meeting in 2007.

The Trustees meet with Committee members at least four times in each year. Trustees and Committee members have a wide range of relevant qualifications and experience, and the Committee includes, as required by the Constitution, one member who is visually-impaired.

### ***Objectives and Activities***

The object of the Association is

*‘to relieve the blind, or the partially sighted, or those labouring under some temporary or permanent incapacity or disability which makes reading a strain, by the provision of equipment, materials and facilities all of whatsoever nature or description to provide for audible reproduction of printed or spoken material and music or tactile reading matter’.*

Members of Talking Friends may subscribe to any or all of *The Friend*, *Quaker Voices*, *Friends Quarterly* and *Towards Wholeness*. All subscribers receive an audio version of *Quaker News*. New subscribers also receive an audio copy of *Advices and Queries*.

During 2014, the Association continued to record these publications. The Royal Mail “Articles for the Blind” free postage concession continued to be used for delivery.

### ***Review of the purpose and activities of Talking Friends***

The number of subscribers has fallen by about 75% since the Association was founded in 1989, and we have concluded that this is a result of there being other means for blind and partially sighted Friends to access printed materials – text-to-speech software, e-readers that will read aloud, and the availability of an on-line edition of *The Friend*. However, those who receive the Association’s recordings do prefer the real voices to computer-generated speech, and some of them are not able to use the Internet or text-to-speech technology.

Use of memory sticks and Sovereign players has been well-received by subscribers.

The new arrangements for copying and distributing the recordings at Friends House had led to a number of problems with reliability, including the duplicator needing repairs. The volunteer who undertakes copying and distribution is available on one day of the week. If the master recording has not arrived, or he is on holiday or otherwise unable to attend, then there is potentially a full week’s delay in copying and distribution.

In April 2014, Alan Johnson drafted a document reviewing the Association’s current position and considering options for the future. He noted the small number of subscribers, and that publicity had not brought in new ones. More

reliable timings for sending out *The Friend*, and new recorded books and pamphlets were needed if the Association was to flourish. However, it was also important to consider how long Central England Quakers could continue to take responsibility for this work.

Gill Coffin and Alan Johnson met in September with Richard Summers and Andrew O'Hanlon of Quaker Life, to review the draft partnership agreement with Friends House and to look for solutions to some of the problems being experienced. It was agreed to continue the current arrangements for the short term, but that Talking Friends will look at bringing the copying and distribution work to Birmingham. Following this meeting, the Committee and Trustees met with Danny Collman of Birmingham Talking Newspapers, who provided information about the process for making multiple recordings. The Committee and Trustees will continue to explore options during 2015.

Alan Johnson, on behalf of the Association, responded to the consultation on the revision of Quaker Faith and Practice, by requesting attention to provision in alternative formats; and to the survey of Listed Informal Groups.

### ***Volunteer readers***

Talking Friends would not be possible without volunteers who read *The Friend*, *Quaker Voices*, *Friends Quarterly* and *Towards Wholeness* aloud on a regular basis. Most of the Association's volunteers are from Central England Area Meeting, but some are from other areas.

### ***Publicity***

The Association continued to advertise regularly in *The Friend* during 2014. A request for new volunteer readers went out in the Area Meeting's News Stream and brought in a number of new readers, The Association had a stall at the Groups fair at Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath in August, and a number of Friends discussed the service and took away leaflets about Talking Friends. The website has been updated and there is a poster about Talking Friends on display at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre.

### ***Governance***

Central England Area Quaker Meeting appoints the Association's Trustees and Alan Johnson reported on the work of the Association to the Area Meeting in February.

### ***Thanks***

Danny Collman from Birmingham Talking Newspapers, for technical support and advice.

Richard Summers, Andrew O'Hanlon, Quaker Life

Martin Sale, volunteer at Friends House

And to all those who read for us.