

Programmes Team 2010

Background information

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre is a residential centre (70+ beds) offering a wide range of courses for Quakers and others, including aspects of Quaker faith and practice as well as a variety of issues and activities in which Friends are interested. Courses range from a single weekend to a PhD programme, and are taught by tutors who are members of the employed Programmes Team as well as by a bank of around two hundred volunteer and contracted Associate Tutors.

We are also well used as a conference centre by a number of other organisations, mostly from the faith-based, voluntary, and non-profit sectors.

Further information can be found at www.woodbrooke.org.uk

History and mission

Woodbrooke was begun in 1903 as an adult settlement, with provision for residential learning. Its purpose was largely initiated by John Wilhelm Rowntree, and it was enabled to come into being by the gift to the Society of Friends of the house and grounds in Bournville which had formerly been the home of George Cadbury. It was intended to equip Friends to understand Quakerism and its distinctive understanding of Christianity, and to engage with social issues. It took the university model of a 3-term year, with tuition through lectures and seminars from a permanent teaching team.

It has always been independent of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), both financially and in terms of strategic development. The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) is its longest-standing donor, having assisted Woodbrooke almost from its inception, and still provides almost £100,000 annually of support to education programme costs. Their current grant commitment runs to 2012.

In 1998, JRCT offered a commission to review purpose, direction and management of Woodbrooke. This resulted in changes implemented from 2000. The term-time programme was laid down and the present year-round short course provision introduced. Longer opportunities for study were maintained by the inclusion of the 2-year Equipping for Ministry course, and the retention of postgraduate provision. The commission also recommended that Woodbrooke's site resources be used to develop a conferencing business. The recommendation to lay down the permanent teaching team was not adopted.

The Council of 60, with an executive committee, had already been reconstituted in 1996/7 to the present 15/16-strong Board of Trustees. There are now around 50 members of staff, including a management team of 4. Over 200 associate tutors support course delivery, and a bank of around 80 other volunteers come to Woodbrooke to assist with the Quaker presence and the 24-hour services. Woodbrooke is normally open for 362 days of the year.

Turnover is (in 2009) about £1.4m annually (a growth of almost 100% in ten years). Of this, about a third is earned through payment for courses, a third from conferencing activity and a third from unearned or donated income. There is no contribution from central BYM funds except on a project by project basis. Friends give individually or through their meetings, providing about £40,000 each year. We have a very limited income from legacy giving.

The education programme now stands at around 120-150 courses annually on site, and around 50 events delivered around the UK and abroad. The Catchpool Fund supports work with European Friends. The Centre for Postgraduate Studies is now a part of the University of Birmingham's Theology department, but is run by (Professor) Ben Pink Dandelion who remains a member of Woodbrooke's staff. Woodbrooke liaises with staff at Friends House on specific projects and has the second largest Quaker library after Friends House, with a general library attached and its own specialist librarian.

Conferencing activity includes both Quaker and non-Quaker groups, booking Woodbrooke for their own programmes of events. Woodbrooke is used by a wide range of organisations and individuals, including West Midlands Probation Service, Birmingham City Council, other educational establishments, the Methodist Church and a variety of third sector institutions. We are currently holders of the Hospitality Assured award, an industry quality assurance standard, and are about to undergo the process to receive the Meetings Industry Award, also a rigorous examination of our hospitality systems.

Woodbrooke's present statement of vision sets out clearly the continuing expectation that we will embody and remain faithful to our foundational values and those of the Religious Society of Friends. A daily meeting for worship, the opportunity to share in epilogue every evening and the constant presence of Friends as staff and volunteers ensure that we live out our example of modern Quakerism in action as an integral part of our witness to the world.

Our teaching programmes

Overall, our mission remains close to that of our founders: the renewal and strengthening of the spiritual roots and witness of Friends and their meetings. Today our programmes aim to:

- enrich and sustain individual lives
- support and strengthen vibrant communities
- understand and respond to the big issues in society

The Programmes Team is thus responsible for a wide range of activity which all takes place under the umbrella of a broad-based curriculum for Quaker learning. We provide for introductory level work, right through to graduate level and research. Most of our courses are non-certificated and participants undertake them for personal growth and development.

We encourage the development of partnership work, both one-off and longer term, with Quaker and other groups. In particular, we are working with Britain

Yearly Meeting to ensure that we co-ordinate our activity in response to **A Framework for Action**.

Increasingly, areas of teaching and new projects cut across our traditional division between on-site and off-site programmes. In response to changes in the Religious Society of Friends, we now offer a large amount of specific **training** to support those undertaking particular roles in service to their meetings, which can be delivered at Woodbrooke or out in meetings. In a formal partnership with Quaker Life, we have developed a new project in support of newer Friends, **Becoming Friends: living and learning with Quakers**. The **Good Lives Project**, working on human and spiritual aspects of sustainability, is now in its second year and is building active links with the Living Witness Project, with Quaker Peace and Social Witness and with organisations beyond the Quaker world. It is likely that future development will see us moving towards further integration of our programmes in this way.

On-site work

We run around 150 **residential short courses** each year, covering many aspects of Quaker faith and practice and societal issues in which Friends are interested. Our teaching team is experienced in biblical studies, theology, practical theology, social change activism, as well as Quaker subjects and aspects of the spiritual life.

The two-year open learning programme, **Equipping for Ministry**, is integrated with the short course programme. The **Eva Koch Scholarship** gives opportunity for non-formal research and exploration of ideas, with opportunity for publication in the **Woodbrooke Journal** (both scholarship and Journal will be reviewed in 2011).

We work with Quaker Peace and Social Witness to offer preparation and other support to **overseas workers and short placements**, including the **Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel**.

We encourage meetings to make use of Woodbrooke in a variety of ways, and each year we welcome a number of groups for **Away Days or Study Weekends** at Woodbrooke, for which we provide tutorial input.

We also run the **Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies** in conjunction with the University of Birmingham. We offer the most comprehensive programme of taught and research degrees in Quaker Studies in the world, and the only one outside the USA. Some 21 people of all ages are currently registered to study for MPhil and PhD degrees, and 33 have graduated over the last 10 years.

Off-site work

Since its inception, Woodbrooke has taken its teaching programmes out to Friends around Britain and beyond. The **Woodbrooke-on-the-Road** programme, designed to respond to Friends' needs for community learning in their own localities, is well-established and has grown over recent years from around a dozen events per annum to more than two dozen. In most years we also offer a sequence of **regionally based seminars and training events**,

normally using larger meeting houses in accessible locations. From time to time, we are also invited to run **one-off events or consultation** for other organisations, such as staff development for Quaker schools or training for a specific group of trustees.

We have developed a range of **learning materials** for individuals and for meetings. The highly successful *Hearts and Minds Prepared* pack encouraged small groups of experienced and newer Friends to learn and reflect together, and equipped facilitators to work with them. The **Catchpool Project** provides for Friends in Continental Europe through online study circles, and is run in a dozen or so languages by trained volunteer facilitators throughout Europe. **Becoming Friends** has built on this first experiment with e-learning, and, through its Companions training, also continues the theme of equipping experienced Friends around the country to support others in their learning and growth. In 2009 we provided a comprehensive set of materials in support of Yearly Meeting Gathering. Future plans include online materials related to Good Lives, and increasing use of our Moodle site to support other courses such as Equipping for Ministry.

Future developments

Our strategic plan contains several programme-related ambitions. We plan to:

- broaden the reach of our teaching, enabling more people beyond the Quaker world to benefit from Quaker insights and experience, and more Quakers and enquirers to engage with the distinctives of our faith
- increase our work with younger people, in particular young adults in the 18 – 30 age range
- develop and integrate our work on spiritual and human aspects of sustainability
- provide a more coherent range of retreats and courses aimed at personal spiritual development
- make the work of the Centre for Postgraduate Studies more widely known, including wider dissemination of research outcomes and arranging specialist and non-specialist conferences and seminars
- work in partnership with other organisations, especially Britain Yearly Meeting, to achieve our aims more effectively
- make use of new media as appropriate, building on our current modest but successful e-learning programmes
- upgrade learning and research resources, particularly through completion of our electronic library catalogue

To support these developments the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Trust has recently made a generous grant for the next three years, with the possibility of a further grant. We are able to combine this new funding with other staff changes (including the planned retirement at the end of 2010 of Judith Jenner, our current Tutor in Quaker Studies) to re-organise the work of the team and recruit to new positions.

Woodbrooke Programmes Team structure 2011 (projected – subject to confirmation)



