



# **The Library of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain**

## **Collection policy**

### **to collect and preserve the Quaker heritage (intellectual, historical and theological)**

This document is a broad collection policy . In time detailed collection development policies specific for each of the collecting areas (archives, printed materials and pictures) will be drawn up.

The purpose of this document is to give a clear statement of our current collecting policy and to assist Friends and users to understand what they can expect to find in the Library. It will be reviewed every 5 years.

The policy is a public document that is available to all who wish to read it. Copies are available from the Library and it is also published on the library pages of the BYM website.

## **Funding/Financial status**

The Library is funded solely by Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) including the contributions of its members and meetings. It does not receive any sources of external public funding. The financial resources of BYM alone are not enough to care for all the collections of materials it already has and those it would like to accept. This inevitably places restrictions on our collection development activities.

## **Description of the Library**

### **History**

From the first, Friends realised two things - the importance of recording their activities, and the importance of the printed word in disseminating their views. The foundations of the present Library were laid in September 1673, when the Second Day's Morning Meeting agreed that two copies of all books written by Friends, and one copy of every book written against them should be procured and kept together. This was followed by a further order in 1682 that printers should bring in two

copies of each book of Friends that they printed. The first central records of the Society date from the Yearly Meeting of 1668. At its core the Library represents the collective memory of the Society. As well as covering Quaker history and thought the collections cover subjects in which Quakers have made social and economic contributions in society at large, eg: pacifism, relief work, penal reform, abolition of slavery. Much of it is unique material.

## **Purpose**

Our **purpose** is to ensure the continuing central collection, safe custody and making appropriately available material, both historical and current, produced by and about the Society of Friends, its faith, insights, works and witness; to employ best professional practice to this end within budgetary constraints; and to encourage such practices in these areas by Friends locally.

Our access policies are designed to provide convenience to researchers consistent with the library's responsibility for the care and preservation of the materials entrusted to its care. See Library Guide 1: Rules for a full explanation on the availability of our collections.

## **Role within Britain Yearly Meeting**

The Library is a section of Quaker Life, and the Library Committee is a functional committee of Quaker Life Central Committee. The current terms of reference for the Library Committee are laid out in *Quaker Faith and Practice* (4.45, 4.46, 8.19 and 13.40).

As the official archive the Library accepts as a matter of course the minutes and other records of the Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings and its central committees.

## **Relationship to local meetings**

The records of local meetings are not collected in the Library but are held either by the meeting or deposited in local repository offices. The only exceptions to this are the records of meetings within the London & Middlesex General Meeting area for which the Library is the official local repository.

Local meetings are responsible for their own records and maintaining their meeting libraries. The Library supports meetings by providing information and advice on the care and preservation of records and meeting libraries. It also maintains a list of the locations of local meeting records.

## **National and International significance**

Today with a total of more than 130,000 items the Library is one of the most important collections on Quakerism in the world. Within the UK the two most important collections are this library and that of Woodbrooke College.

Much of the Library's collection has an interest beyond the Quaker community. Readers and enquirers come from all over the world and about 60% of our users are not Friends or attenders. By allowing access to the evidence and records of Quaker work and through the research the Library's collections make possible the Society can gain a better understanding of past Quaker activities and experience.

## **General Collection Guidelines**

### **Material types**

The Library collects:

- printed materials - printed books, pamphlets, leaflets and ephemera, periodicals, press cuttings.
- archives and manuscripts - original documents, letters, journals, personal papers
- visual resources - photographs, paintings, drawings, prints and posters, film and video
- audio recordings - vinyl, audio tape, CD
- electronic materials - disk, CDROM and other formats
- some artefacts

### **Accessibility**

The Library can accommodate and make accessible material in the following formats: print, manuscript, photographic and microfilm, CDROM.

Whilst it does collect electronic, film and video, and audio formats it does not currently have the equipment to make materials in these formats available. We accept paintings, works of art and some artefacts but are not able to have them on permanent exhibit.

### **Collecting criteria**

Where the word "materials" is used it incorporates all the material types listed above.

We seek to collect using the following criteria:

- materials that support the official records and archives of BYM and provide an insight which the original records may not always convey
  - the materials of Friends organisations, Quaker special interest groups and informal groups that are within BYM
  - archives and manuscripts of Friends (published and unpublished) that illustrate their life as a Quaker within BYM or the importance of Quakerism to their life
  - printed materials and works of art where the author or artist is a Friend provided they are on relevant religious or social issues or clearly demonstrate a Quaker point of view
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- materials that are wholly or partly about Quakerism or are about matters in which Friends have been concerned
  - printed materials, visual and audio resources that give a portrayal of Quaker life, character or testimony (This can include musical, poetic and artistic works, and works of fiction)
  - theses and published research which have drawn substantially on the Library's collections
  - printed materials produced by the central committees of BYM (books, pamphlets, leaflets, newsletters and periodicals, posters and publicity material, audio-visual material)
  - printed materials produced by local meetings within BYM, including newsletters

## **Acquisition**

With printed materials our ideal is to collect two copies of all publications. However because of financial limitations we now only purchase two copies of British Quaker publications and one copy of Quaker publications from America and other parts of the world.

## **Donations**

The Library has a very small acquisitions budget and relies heavily on donations and gifts of items. Over the years we have been indebted to the many Friends and individuals who have donated copies of books, published research, archives, and visual resources. These have always formed an important element of our collecting activities.

We welcome gifts of manuscripts but regret that at present we do not have the staff to sort and catalogue them.

We do not charge researchers to use the Library but ask them to present us with a copy of their thesis or publication.

Central committees are required to give to the Library two copies of any printed material they publish; local meetings are asked to do the same.

We are always pleased to accept gifts that fit our collection policy, but do not normally accept any items on deposit or with conditions attached.

In all instances materials are accepted at the discretion of the Librarian, with reference to the Library Committee when it is felt necessary.

## **Exclusions**

We reserve the right to refuse the following:

- some ephemera of Friends
- materials that have a borderline interest for the Society
- items or collections for which access could never be permitted because they are in extremely poor condition and to repair them would be costly

## **Disposal**

Gifts of printed materials are accepted on condition that unwanted items can be disposed of by either offering to Woodbrooke and other libraries or individuals, or for sale through the Quaker Bookshop.

The Library reserves the right to transfer items from its collections where they are BYM property or the conditions of donation/deposit allow, to a more suitable library or repository if the subject matter:

- does not match the collection criteria
- the Library cannot accommodate them satisfactorily
- the Library does not have the facilities to make them available to users
- they are additional copies of printed materials already in our collection

Library Committee of Quaker Life Central Committee  
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