



Quaker Arts Network (QAN) at the Greenbelt Festival

The Greenbelt Festival of Arts, Faith and Activism took place at Boughton Manor, Northamptonshire from Friday 23 to Sunday 25 August 2024. QAN was approached by Greenbelt to provide Loving Earth Project (LEP) workshops and exhibit 70 textile panels.



QAN also agreed to run a festival 'takeaway' gazebo. The aims were to:

1. celebrate and raise the profile of Quakers, our spirituality, witness and creative arts practices
2. provide information about Quakers and invite festival attendees to Quaker Meetings
3. support Quakers in Northamptonshire
4. encourage Friends to share their Quaker faith with others
5. explore the feasibility of a continuing association with Greenbelt.



The QAN team at Greenbelt

Andy O'Hanlon and David Curtis invited members of QAN and other Quakers known to have connections with/interests in Festival arts from across the country, to an online advisory meeting. An initial ideas and planning group including Amanda Jones, Kirsten Lavers, Jessica Metheringham and Gill Sewell (who were unable to be part of the festival team) swelled with the selection of nine more QAN-Greenbelt volunteers, led by

Caitlin Curtis, and became the core delivery group. These Friends were Aileen Braidwood, Becky Calcraft (and daughter Rona), Abigail Maxwell, Alex Skinner, Alison Tarpey-Black, Jemimah Hawkes, James Priestman, Josiane Smith, Linda Murgatroyd.

Andy, David and Caitlin, coordinated communications, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, insurance, liaison with Greenbelt and BYM. They designed the gazebo, sourced/purchased/collected furniture, equipment and materials, ensured all appliances were checked and tested and completed the gazebo risk assessment. The planning group provided a sounding board, new ideas, energy, and the people for gazebo activity, set up and get out.

Abigail Maxwell, a former Northamptonshire Quaker, and Aileen Braidwood, a Britain Yearly Meeting Local Development Worker for Northamptonshire, also contributed on behalf of Quakers in Britain, coordinating a Meeting for Worship in the Shelter space (and in the Orchard) on Friday.

Greenbelt located the QAN gazebo in the quieter Orchard area, adjacent to the Shelter worship space and allowed easy access to the Loving Earth display and workshops.



Meeting the Aims

1. Celebrate

The gazebo became a meeting place for Quakers and enquirers, a kind of Quaker

centre. Advices and Queries featured in the planning of the event, and 300 copies were distributed. A two-hour looped slide show and catalogue, curated by Kirsten Lavers, submitted by Quaker artists of images by particular queries filled a large screen (provided by Jesus Lane Quaker Meeting) at one end of the gazebo.

There were many participatory arts activities – including two creative writing activities - that afforded opportunities for conversation including ethical board games; group drawing and colouring; Loving Earth panel making; sharing 300 cups of Glastonbury well water; and consultations with the poetry doctor (James Pendle) proving very popular. The QAN presence at the Festival led to BYM organising a slideshow on the main stage, with images seen by thousands of people.

2. Inform

The gazebo had around 500 visitors. Some shared how they had first encountered Quakers at

Greenbelt and have since become Friends. All were offered Quaker Advices and Queries, information leaflets, resources and reference books provided by BYM. Around 200 people attended the Meeting for Worship in the Shelter, which has become a regular annual event.

BYM paid Greenbelt for advertising Quakers in Britain (in the form of three slides, designed by the Communications team) on the main festival stage. T shirts with the words 'Simple, Radical, Spiritual' were provided for gazebo volunteers. Over 100 copies of Being A Quaker by Geoffrey Durham were distributed, and other Quaker books were available in the gazebo for reference.

3. Support

Local Development Worker Aileen Braidwood, was invited to participate in project planning and contributed to the coordination of the Meeting for Worship on Friday. Northampton Area Meeting provided financial support for QANs Greenbelt initiative.

4. Encourage

The team of twelve volunteers were chosen to share their enthusiasm for Quaker outreach. The gazebo not only provided information, but also offered activities that encouraged open conversations. The slide show in the gazebo, curated by Kirsten Lavers, made for the gazebo, featured images inspired by particular Advices and Queries, from Quakers across the country. Copies of Advices and Queries were distributed at the well-attended Meeting for Worship in the Shelter, and available at the gazebo throughout the Festival. Quaker Quicks, Kindler publications, Swarthmore lectures and other books introducing Quakers (provided by the Quaker bookshop) were also available for reference. QAN volunteers closed with a well-attended and joyful thirty minute meeting for worship in the Wild Goose (Iona Community) tent.

5. Explore

The feeling amongst the QAN team present at the festival was that Quakers were a natural fit at Greenbelt and there is a good case to be made for developing a presence at the festival in 2025.



Evaluation

Around 500 people visited the gazebo. Two hundred people attended the Meeting for Worship in the Shelter.

During the festival, visitors to the QAN gazebo were invited to offer short written feedback, which included the following comments:

“Great to see Quaker representation and activities at Greenbelt. Poetry was a real surprise. Keep coming!”

“This is an extraordinarily inspiring project – one of connection, creativity and community.”

“The beautiful conversation the chess generated.”

“Thank you for a gentle space, a welcome break away from the busy. I felt warmly welcomed and grateful for a moment of calm.”

Following the event, members of the volunteer group were asked for their assessment of the project. They included these points:

“I found it a really good balance between QAN volunteering and festival time. I had lots of opportunities to do singing, listening to music, dancing, life drawing, willow weaving, wandering and exploring the different stalls. I met lots of strangers and felt that I could get straight to the 'interesting stuff' with them, which I have not experienced elsewhere. There is an openness at Greenbelt which feels so refreshing.”

“I had a number of conversations with people who noticed the T-shirt and wanted to ask questions or talk about Quakers. Including one local vicar who decided, after we spoke, that he would use A&Q as starting points in his church discussion group.”

“Crafting was very popular among young teenagers. In one group, one of them had been to a Quaker meeting with her boyfriend. The other 5 had never heard of us before. They left, knowing that they would be welcome, even if they just wanted a quiet place to sit and reflect.”

“I would point to the wide range of people who engaged with us: from toddlers to the elderly. Families and single people. People with a range of engagement with religion.”

Finances

Our total expenditure on the project was £3,817. We are grateful to BYM for providing outreach materials, and for funding a Quaker slideshow on the mainstage, which was seen by thousands.

Income to date is £2,463.00. We are very grateful for assistance from local & area meetings including Hampshire & Islands AM, Northamptonshire AM and The Poores Fund, and other generous donors.

Next steps

A decision about attending next year's Greenbelt Festival will be made soon. Should it go ahead, a budgeted five-year plan (2025-2030) will be drafted, with a view to QAN becoming an associate partner of the Festival in due course.

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