



Quiet Company Annual Review 2020



2020 started full of promise for Quiet Company. We opened the year well, building on the achievements of the previous year – the opening of the Seed Kitchen and refurbishment of the Leslie Forster Suite. But like so many other businesses, particularly in the events and hospitality sector, we quickly moved into a quite different mode.

Although we closed to the public for most of the year, and many staff were furloughed, we kept up the activity we could:

- Running the bookshop online and selling further afield than ever before,
- Maintaining contact with clients via our sales team, the website, and social media,
- Keeping the buildings safe and secure.

All this work meant we were able to reopen by September, welcoming customers back to a now Covid-secure venue for a few months while the law allowed.

As I write this in March 2021, we have a clearer path out of lockdown than we ever did last year. Dealing with uncertainty and a rapidly changing situation was the biggest challenge we faced, and on behalf of the board I want to thank all our staff for their efforts: whether doing their jobs, picking up new responsibilities, or keeping up each other's morale when it was needed the most, they exemplified everything a Quaker business is about.

Courage, kindness, and cooperation in tough times. The year may not have panned out as we thought, but it certainly showed what we are capable of. As you read this annual review, keep in mind the people who made it happen. I hope they will get to welcome you to Friends House or Swarthmoor Hall someday soon.

Matt Baker
Clerk to the Board of Directors

An empty Regent Street, London, May 2020
Photo by Joe Stubbs on Unsplash





Welcome to our annual review for 2020, which turned out to be a roller coaster of a year. The year had started off well:

- Our sales for the first two months were seeing growth compared to the previous year, with the value of bookings per delegate going up,
- The second year of the Bake the Difference training programme had just finished,
- We were on track to better last year’s overall profit of £4.3 million.

How quickly things can change? Who would have thought a pandemic would bring us, and many other hospitality companies and venues, to our knees within a few months. So, you might be thinking what have we got to review, celebrate or even hope for?

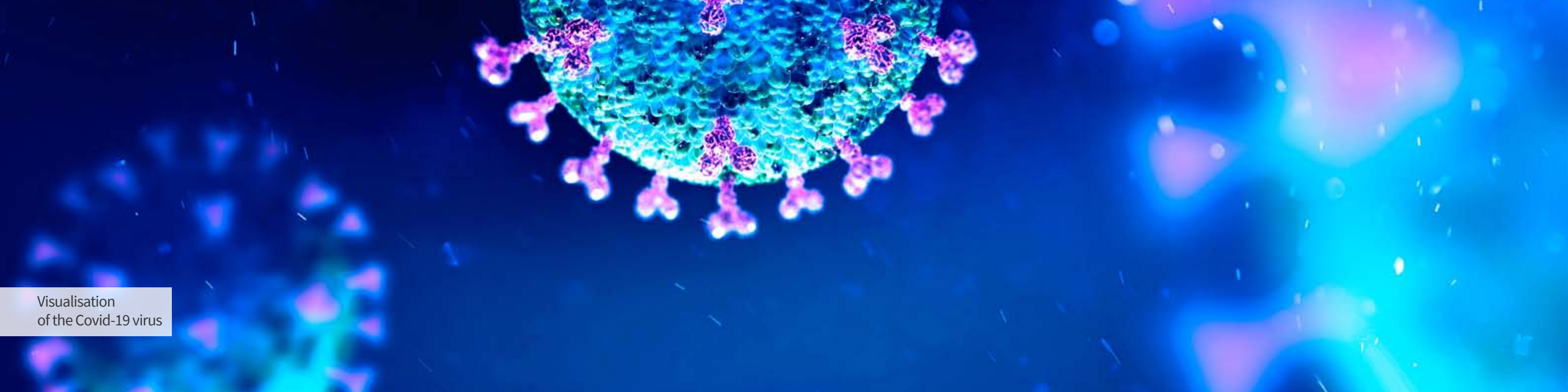
Well, this review will focus on the challenges we have faced, while recognising the resilience of the team, their creativity and most of all their positivity. Let’s celebrate those glimmers of hope that were achieved

in 2020. We will also reflect on our Quaker values and guiding principle of the triple bottom line (people, planet and profit) and how they helped us in our decision making during what have been extremely uncertain times.

I hope after reading this review you will feel reassured that we will build back better, ensuring a future where our team’s wellbeing is key, and they can continue to flourish. A future where our customers and visitors feel safe to meet, stay or eat in our venues. Now, more than ever, it’s time to put some faith back into business.

Paul Henderson-Grey
CEO of Quiet Company

Visualisation
of the Covid-19 virus





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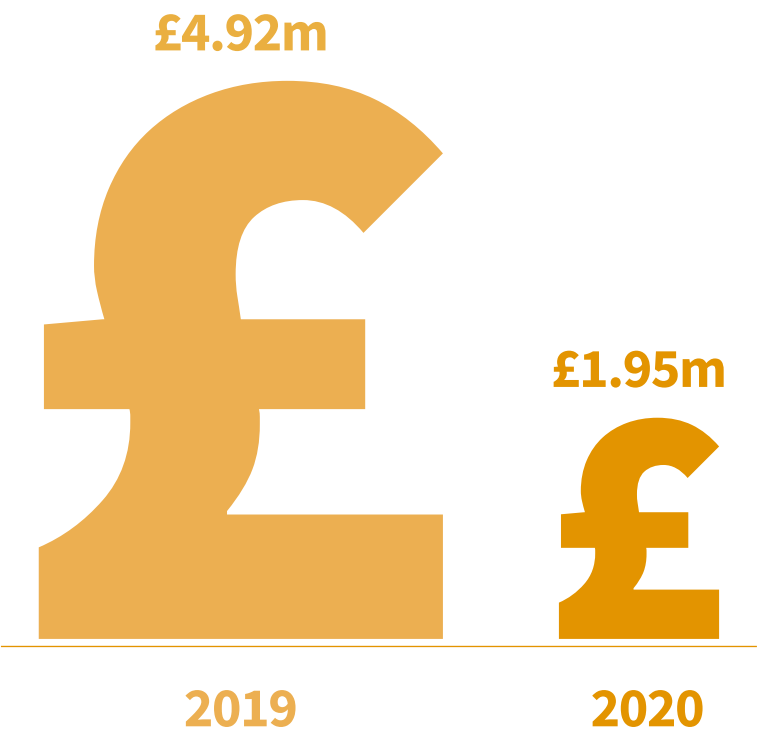
Total income*

Income is down, which was expected, as we were only able to trade fully from January to March, and then as allowed by the Government’s restrictions.

Total income breakdown

Our 2020 turnover was **£1.5m**. We made use of the Government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (**£448k**), which is shown as income.

Despite reducing our costs through the voluntary redundancy scheme, we knew a loss was to be expected. To bridge the gap to future recovery, the board arranged a loan facility on commercial terms from our shareholder Britain Yearly Meeting of an additional **£1.5m**, most of which remains unused.



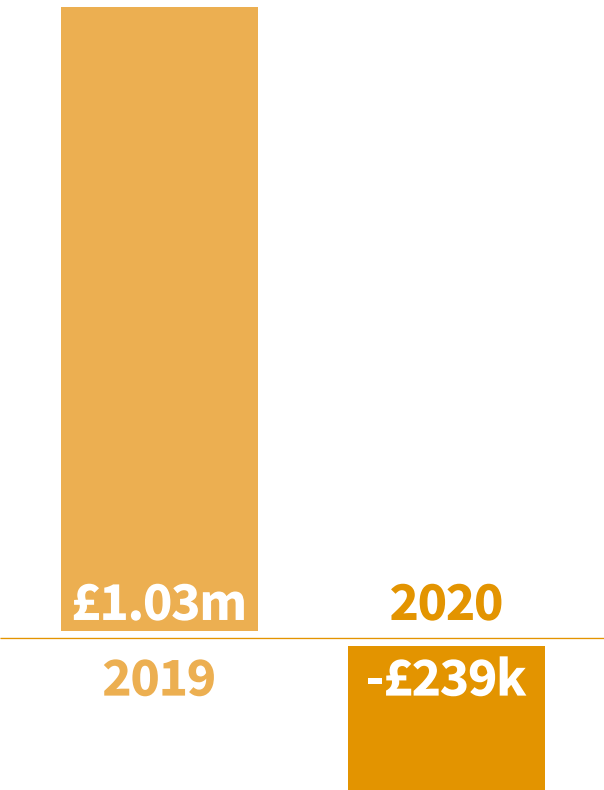
*Figures for Quiet Company income do not include Facilities, Swarthmoor Hall or the Quaker Centre Bookshop.

Loss and impact on gift-aid to Quaker work**

Unfortunately, we were not able to gift-aid any profits to the charity of Britain Yearly Meeting this year.

In normal years, we would make a substantial contribution to building costs and overheads.

Due to the challenges of the pandemic, we made a loss (**£239k**), which included the costs of the voluntary redundancy scheme run in 2020 (**£410k**).



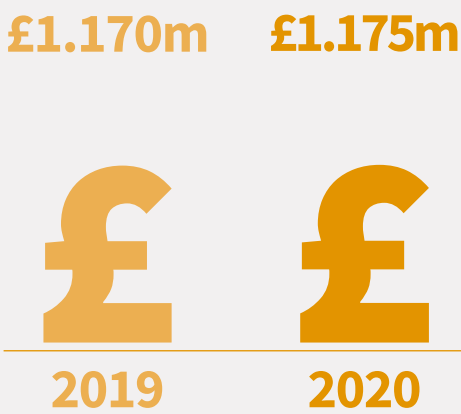
**Gift-aided (pre-tax) income for BYM, generated from Quiet Company profits.

Before the pandemic: off to a great start

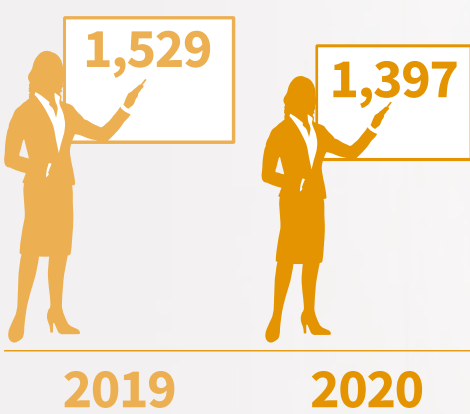
2020 had started on a high for us. This was reflected in the sales figures at Friends House.

The Friends House team did a wonderful job in the first quarter of 2020. The value of bookings per delegate went up by **£25** compared to the first quarter of 2019. This is despite the fact that we were only able to trade for two and a half months and faced many cancellations from late February/early March.

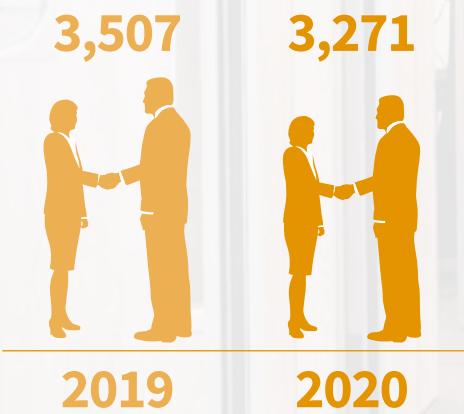
Q1 gross sales



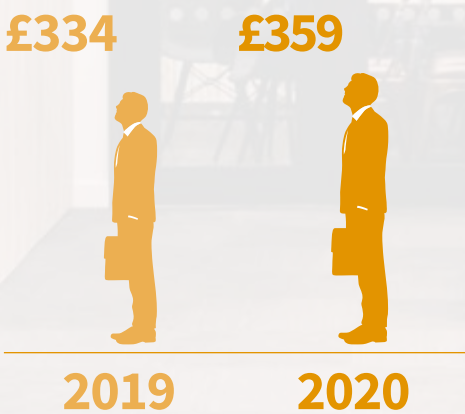
Q1 bookings



Q1 delegate numbers



Value per delegate



Bake The Difference is our social enterprise programme aimed at people with a history of breaking the law or antisocial behaviour and a diagnosis of personality disorder. Participants learn how to bake in the Friends House kitchen and also have the opportunity to gain front of house skills in the venue. This helps them integrate back into the community.

For six months, between September 2019 and February 2020, trainees were supervised by an experienced trainer. We also introduced a Peer Mentor position, where a former trainee was appointed to support new trainees throughout their placements. The trainees appreciated him as a person to look up to and a source of hope. For the Peer Mentor himself, this has been an uplifting experience. He felt supported and included in the decision-making by the Friends House team, while also able to support trainees. The Peer Mentor scheme will come back for the next run of the programme.

What's next for the programme?

The pandemic has greatly impacted the catering team at Friends House and there wouldn't be enough work for the trainees in this department alone. They will have the opportunity to work in the facilities team, bookshop and in front of house positions. We aim to restart the programme as soon as it is safe to do so.

Amy Wollny
Social Inclusion Clinical Practitioner

“ Bake the Difference offers an opportunity to some of the country's most marginalised men. I say this because they have almost always suffered significant abuse or neglect, had ongoing experiences of alienation and failure — alongside serving significant prison sentences. This can leave them institutionalised and full of shame and remorse. Bake the Difference not only enabled them to acquire a set of practical skills, but it has also given them a sense of belonging and acceptance. They have all spoken at great lengths about how much it impacted their self-worth and esteem. It has offered a safe, authentic and supportive working environment and has honestly been life changing for so many.

It's made me want to work more and learn more about the food industry.

Trainee A

The peer mentor really is an asset... he gives us all hope that we can live a crime free life.

Trainee B

This role started for me through a catering work placement, but over four years it has turned into this beautiful thing.

Peer Mentor



Our values informed our choices and enabled us to take the right decisions at the start of the pandemic and during lockdown. We were truthful, transparent, and honest to our staff, customers and Friends.

Supporting our staff

Treating staff fairly

What we did:

- We topped-up the salaries of furloughed staff on the lowest grades by 20%, so that no one was negatively impacted financially.
- We proposed a voluntary redundancy scheme to staff offering substantially more than the statutory minimum.

Keeping in touch with staff

What we did:

- Staff had the opportunity to take resilience and mindfulness online trainings.
- We set up a Zoom chat for furloughed and non-furloughed staff to talk about everything (except work!) and organised some quiz nights.



Zoom chat for furloughed and non-furloughed staff

Nicola Purdy
Head of Service Delivery,
on new ways of
communicating with staff
during the pandemic



“ In the first week of the first lockdown, we decided that we needed to make communication a priority. However, we know that phone calls are not for everyone, so every manager spoke to their team members to ask what would work best for them and what frequency (if any) of calls they wanted. Some wanted to speak to us weekly, others monthly, some preferred Zoom, some preferred WhatsApp.

We also set up a weekly coffee and chat call for everyone to join if they wanted to and even did some online quiz nights. Without the usual conversations about delegate numbers and rotas, we got to know much more about each other than ever before.

I believe that when we are able to work together again, we will have a much closer and stronger team because of this.

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Reflecting on staff contributions

We would like to thank our staff, past and present. Their commitment to the company has been remarkable throughout this difficult period.

We are grateful to the members of staff who took a voluntary redundancy. This allowed us to reduce our size, adapt, and get through the storm.

Thank you to the remaining members of staff, who helped us adapt to the many restrictions in place.



Working at Friends House: in their own words

Elizabeth Sowah and Agata Galik are two former staff members, who took a voluntary redundancy. They tell us about their experience working at Friends House.

Agata Galik
Quaker Centre Café
Supervisor



How many years have you worked at Friends House?
I have worked at Friends House for five and a half years.

What did you enjoy the most about working at Friends House?
I enjoyed the opportunity to work in different roles. This enabled me to gain more knowledge of the hospitality industry and get more skills along the way. I did a few secondment jobs too, which helped me expand my knowledge in completely different fields.

What were your most memorable moments?
One of the things I will miss terribly will be not being involved in the big meetings my team and I were handling. There were days when we had to efficiently and quickly serve hundreds of people for hours. Sometimes it was really hard but the satisfaction I had at the end of my shifts and the fantastic feedback from customers made it all worth it. Friends House is one of those places in London where you can see a wide range of people, whether attending meetings or just spending some time with friends in our café. I was lucky enough to meet and have a chat with a famous scientist whose work I really respect.

How would you describe your colleagues?
Friends House gave me the possibility to meet and befriend so many amazing people. Regardless of our cultural or other differences, we were always able to find a way to understand and respect each other.

Elizabeth Sowah
Friends House
Chef



How many years have you worked at Friends House?
I have worked at Friends House for 31 years and a few months.

What did you enjoy the most about working at Friends House?
Being creative in my cooking and baking. I loved making vegan and vegetarian food, rock cakes, desserts and speciality cakes. I was making everything from scratch.

What was your funniest moment?
My funniest moment would have to be what happened during a Yearly Meeting afternoon session in the 90s. The taps suddenly stopped running in Friends House and we had to go get water from the Quaker International Centre (located a few blocks away).

What was your most memorable moment?
When I first started, I had a one-week induction course, where the General Secretaries (managers), as they were called back then, from various departments told us about the Quakers, their ethics, values, and respect for each other.

How would you describe your colleagues?
We worked like a family. We had different opinions on the way to do things sometimes, but we managed to overcome our differences without yelling at each other. We always worked things out through calm communication and respected each other's viewpoints.

Reporting on our diversity

We made sure that the voluntary redundancy scheme did not impact more staff from BAME background than others.

Pre
scheme
24.3%

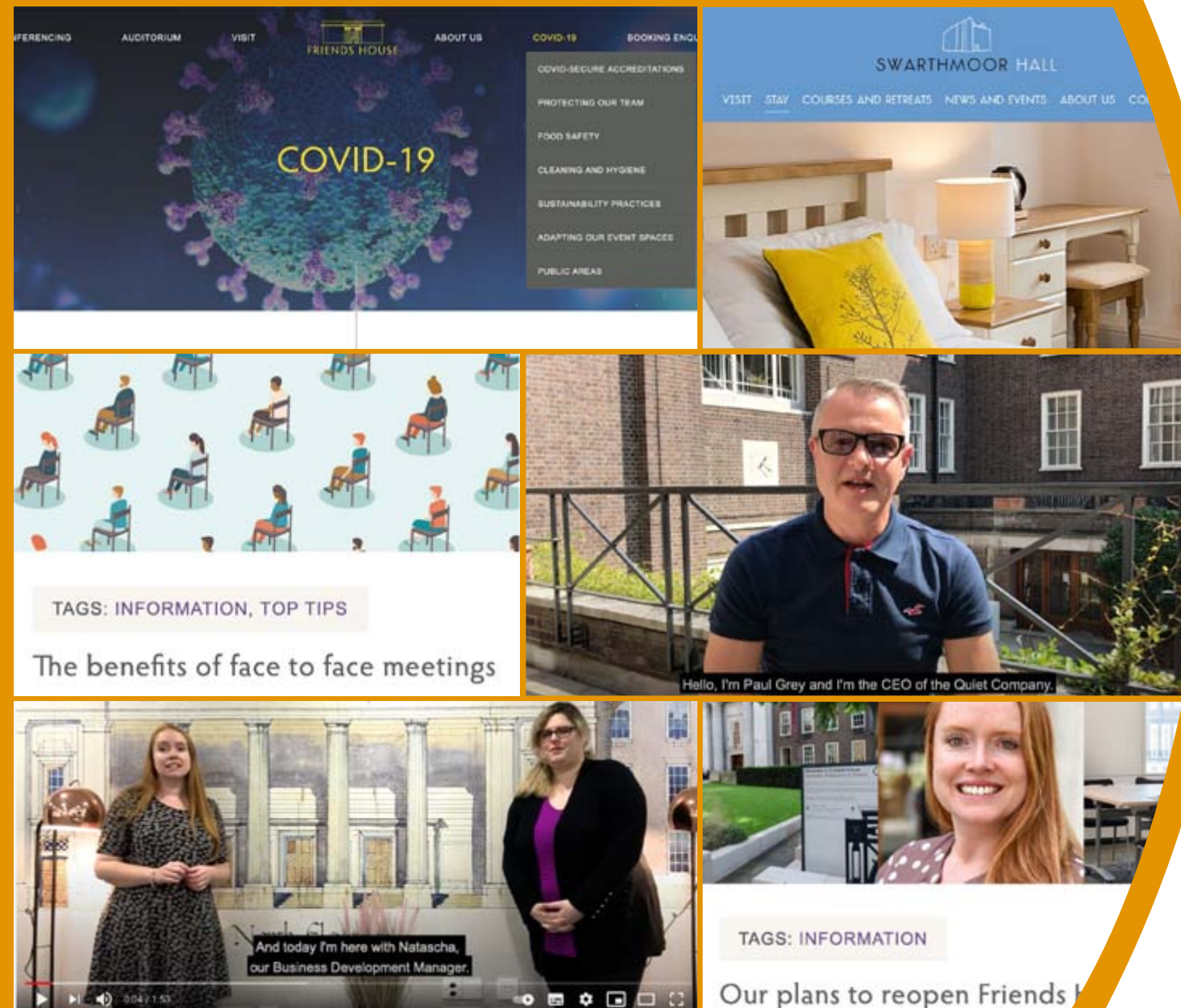
Post
scheme
27.7%

The percentage of BAME staff before and after the scheme took place remained stable.

Helping our customers

What we did:

- We set up a Covid-19 resource centre on the Friends House website to inform customers and Friends about the Covid-secure guidelines.
- The Friends House sales and events team offered flexible cancellations to event organisers, who could also postpone their events to a later date.
- We worked with Cottages.com to set up a direct booking link for the Swarthmoor Hall self-catering suites.
- We produced videos explaining our Covid-safe guidelines.
- We wrote blogs to regularly update customers and also explain the many changes that took place in our venues.



Preparing our facilities

Staff worked hard to get Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall ready for reopening. Both sites received Covid-secure accreditations from two leading bodies in the events and hospitality industry:

- The Meetings Industry Association delivered the AIM secure accreditation to Friends House.
- Visit England delivered the 'We're Good To Go' accreditation to Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall.



James Newman-Shah
Quaker Centre Bookshop
and Café manager,
on adapting



“ Prior to reopening we all had to adapt to the new ways of working at Friends House, ensuring we also keep to the high standards expected of us for our individual jobs.

I continued to ensure we were able to run our bookshop online, dispatching books in a timely manner whilst also assisting others in ensuring the building was adapted to the new safety standards that the pandemic presented us with. This included cleaning, working closely with the facilities manager, and re-mapping Friends House for customers, providing them with a safe environment whilst visiting the site.

Other staff were also expected to learn new ways of working through providing support in the café and for room bookings, cleaning (as previously mentioned) and providing wider support for each-other where staff numbers were kept to a minimum.

Tamsin Miller
Reservations &
Administration
Coordinator at
Swarthmoor Hall,
on reopening



“ We transformed Swarthmoor Hall into self-catering holiday units. This involved not only changing and adapting the accommodation but also the way I worked.

I took on different types of tasks due to some staff being on furlough. I worked remotely with regard to administration and finance and also worked on-site, cleaning between guest stays.

I have missed seeing the rest of my colleagues but the work has kept me focused. It has shown me that we were able to adapt quickly in order to welcome people back in the peaceful environment of Swarthmoor Hall.



Adapting to the pandemic: living our values

#LightInRed

We took part in the **#LightInRed** day of global action on Wednesday 30 September.

At 8:00 pm, we lit the facade of Friends House in red to raise awareness about the difficult situation the event industry was facing due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many venues across the country did the same, responding to the call from the **#WeMakeEvents** campaign.

Friends House,
London

2020 was a turbulent time for the operations at Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall, but we adapted our services, continued to sell books, coffee, meeting rooms and accommodation.

Friends House

We reopened the venue on the 1 September and successfully held **49** events between September and December. We provided delegates with Covid-safe catering stations, including biodegradable bento boxes.

The Events team ensured a smooth and safe return to events with the “Peace of Mind Promise”, enabling customers to cancel for free or postpone their event more easily.

We also successfully launched the new Friends House website. We mainly improved the user experience and added some new pages such as “Meet the Team”, “Careers”, and the “Covid-19” resource centre.



Swarthmoor Hall

We turned Swarthmoor Hall into self-catered accommodation which involved making all rooms covid-safe and cleaning the whole site. We cleared three months’ worth of spiders and cobwebs!

We had **33** self-catering bookings since reopening in August. Guests were able to book their stays on Cottages.com.



Quaker Centre Bookshop and Café

We **refurbished** the Quaker Centre Bookshop and Café during the summer, reopening it in September, at the same time as Friends House.

We sold **1,221** books on our online shop between April and September and sent books over to **Canada, China, Australia, South Africa, Spain, Germany, Finland** and many more countries.



They trusted us

Swarthmoor Hall guest feedback

“ The Wansfell suite was brilliant and completely unique, in having accommodation for six people with four bathrooms! It made it so much more comfortable without having to timetable everyone through the shower. Location is also brilliant. Ulverston has everything you need just five minutes drive from the cottage, yet it feels very rural and peaceful.

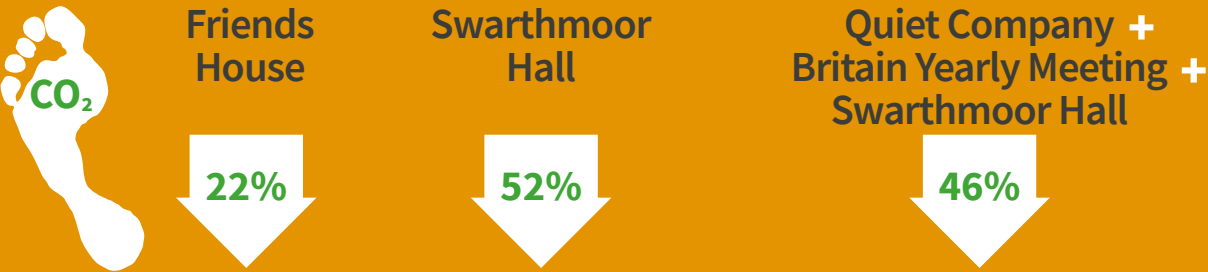
Friends House customer feedback

“ Our event was organised extremely well and ample measures were taken to make sure that all delegates felt safe and welcome. The rooms were set out with plenty of space for social distancing and hand sanitiser stations were readily available. The staff were on hand to assist with anything and the day ran very smoothly. Looking forward to hosting many more events here in the future.

Anu Chandy
(University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust)

Carbon footprint

Due to the pandemic, there was a real decrease in the total carbon footprint of our operations, compared to 2019:



These reductions were driven by the successive lockdowns, which resulted in less electricity consumption and domestic and international travel. As fewer delegates attended meetings in 2020, the carbon footprint per delegate unfortunately went up.

Green gas

Gas consumption also decreased across both sites, but from March 2020 our supplier became unable to provide a Green Gas certification which had a slight effect on the building emissions. We are currently working on sourcing a green gas provider but if we were not able to get the certification we required, this would have an overall effect on 2021 buildings emissions.

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals



Goal 3: Good health and well-being

We want to promote physical health and mental health and well-being for our staff and the wider community. We have started this work by opening the Seed Kitchen restaurant, a vegetarian and vegan eatery at Friends House.



Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth

We do not think a business should thrive at the expense of its people. We are a Living Wage employer and open our doors to people from disadvantaged groups.



Goal 11: Responsible consumption and production

The resources of the earth are not endless and we intend to play our part in building a sustainable future. We have already taken the MIA #20percentLess pledge in a bid to reduce single-use plastic at Friends House, which we successfully did.



Goal 13: Climate action

We have already remarkably reduced our carbon emissions since setting up the company in 2007. We will carry on improving our facilities in London and Cumbria to ensure our carbon footprint remains as low as possible.



Goal 15: Life on land

We operate in two very different areas: London and Cumbria. The challenges in both operations are very different but the goal remains the same: we want to protect the local eco-systems.

What happened to our bees during lockdown?

As the building was closed, the bees were moved by our beekeeper to a safe haven in Brockley, South London.

They will remain there until the building is fully reopened.



Brockley,
South London

Beehives on the
roof of Friends House

The company will still be a Quaker-run business, relying on its values and the triple bottom line for its decision making. It will still be sustainable and ethical, but it will need to reinvent itself in ways that it had not planned before, or so soon.

Re-imagining



We need to review and remodel our current service offer and resourcing to make them more resilient in a post-Covid world.



Our new bento box was introduced after we reviewed our catering offer.

Re-engaging



We need to communicate with our customers and Friends to show how our ethical brand will help us build back better.



A screen-shot of the video tour we produced featuring Nicola.

Re-modelling



We need to expand our service offer and bring our wealth of experience to others, talents and skills included.



Tony and Paul on the scaffolding inspecting the re-modelling project at Friends House.

Our values informed our choices and enabled us to take the right decisions at the start of the pandemic and during lockdown. We were truthful, transparent, and honest to our staff, customers and Friends.

Communications



We're launching a dedicated company website, where you will find all the information about our purpose, green credentials and service offers.

In the long term, we will also add a recruitment page.

Swarthmoor Hall



As the site will be closed for most of 2021, this will be the opportunity to do vital work and allow the hall to welcome more visitors in the future:

- The work to remove the render will start in December 2021.
- We will start building a car park with an electric vehicle charging station in summer 2021

Friends House



In response to the ongoing pandemic, and to ensure customers' wellbeing, we will create a space in the Quaker Centre where anyone will be able to come to rest or just find some peace and quiet for a few minutes.

We will also invest in newer audio-visual equipment to allow for hybrid events.

Governance and commitments to COP26



We're currently working on our 2021-2025 Business Plan and hope to launch it very soon.

We'll be working towards offsetting more of our carbon footprint. We hope to be able to offer a UK-based tree planting scheme, such as the National Forest scheme, to customers by autumn 2021. We will also define a road-map for the company to become net zero by 2030.



Joe Warren, our new board member tells us his view for the future

What is your background?

I work in the clean energy sector and I helped to start a small business that uses batteries to store renewable energy for when the sun is not shining. I got interested in renewable energy technology nearly fifteen years ago when I worked for a company running thousands of computers which power the internet. There was a lot of electricity being used and I was interested in finding a way to make it completely renewable. I've been a Quaker at Harpenden Quaker Meeting in Hertfordshire for about six years.

Why did you choose to join the board of Quiet Company?

I'm grateful to be given the opportunity to serve on the Quiet Company board. I have been interested in social businesses and how they work for a long time. Quiet Company is a fascinating example of this, running a successful business while also helping people and the planet. When I applied for this position I

hoped that I would be able to help the Quiet Company board to build on this success and also to navigate the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

What are your aspirations for the company?

Like many sectors, the hospitality sector, including conferencing, has been severely impacted during the pandemic. Some things will inevitably change but as we emerge from the pandemic, I am confident that the company will be able to build on its previous success. As well as generating profits from its activities, the company does a huge amount of good through its work, for example through the Bake the Difference programme. I share the company's aspirations to grow so that it can spread this positive impact wider.

What do you wish to learn from this experience?

I am looking forward to working with the Quiet Company team and learning more about social business in particular. It will also be interesting to learn more about the hospitality sector as it undergoes some significant changes. The most important thing is that Quiet Company benefits from my support and I hope I can provide some useful input to the board over the next three years.



Swarthmoor Hall,
Ulverston


With 2020 behind us, we turn our attention to 2021 and the potential it holds. We go in the new year with a smaller team, but just as focused on the things that matter.

Our purpose remains unchanged: we support the work of Quakers in Britain. We do this through the way we work; every interaction with a customer, with a supplier or between colleagues contributes a little to the way we see each other, and the way the world sees Quakers. We do this through the funds we raise for Quaker work, in the UK and abroad. And we do this through our custody of Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall, maintaining the fabric and the spirit of both buildings. This much has not changed a bit.

But the way we achieve these things can evolve – we have grown as a business over the last 12 years, welcomed new people to the fold, and refined our service offering. Our resilience saw us through a challenging year, and we will keep developing that strength. We now have the chance to reengage with our customers, to seek out new opportunities, and to continue the work of building a company that does good. I do not think I will forget 2020 in a hurry, and I suspect that is true for you, too. But that is just one year in our shared history, one to keep in mind as we review our position.

And now, we start the next chapter.

Matt Baker
Clerk to the Board of Directors



Swarthmoor Hall,
Ulverston

Quiet



Quiet Company

www.quietcompany.co.uk

Friends House

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www.friendshouse.co.uk

friendshousedn

Swarthmoor Hall

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www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk

swarthmoorhall

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