

To: Helen Griffith From: Alan Rowland

21 April 2006

Subject: Hereford and Mid-Wales MM

I have contacted several Friends whose views I thought might help. The enquiry provoked much head scratching and pleasure that our MM is well regarded. But that is not much help to you I fear!

As one Friend put it, being so geographically challenged is one of the significant factors, if not the most significant factor, determining the way we work. Therefore we meet all day on a Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.. Friends arrive any time after 10 o'clock for tea/coffee and a chat. Lunch is an hour from 1 to 2 and is followed by a speaker who is given an hour slot. A sumptuous MM tea brings it all to a close.

We have been blessed with a wealth of excellent speakers, mostly Quakers but not all by any means. Poets and administrators, people working with asylum seekers, people going to Africa to teach about farming (one of those has now applied for membership!), returning QPSW workers, QUNO, Parliamentary liaison, people to make us laugh and others who make us want to cry - oh the list goes on and on. Wonderful! These speakers are an undoubted attraction which encourages Friends to travel considerable distances.

The downside of this all day Saturday meeting is that it favours the retired; yet who would wish to motor 50 or more miles each way for a short evening business meeting? On the other hand we have a regular turnout about the forty or more mark. So probably about double this number of Friends get to know each other well and are friends indeed. This friendship level is certainly a significant factor.

It has been the practice for Nominations Committee to meet during the lunch break but the fifty minutes or so this gives is not really sufficient. Also its members are deprived of the chats with other Friends. The committee is looking at other ways of working. It might be significant that MM recently decided that between meeting appointments could be made by a phone consultation.

Elders and Overseers meet together twice a year for business on a Saturday afternoon and twice on a Saturday for a day's "retreat" at the Pales. Again the problem of distance and day are evident.

We recently tried a Single Item Meeting to explore RECAST issues ahead of Yearly Meeting. This proved valuable although the Saturday problem remained.

On the whole I think that there is a strong sense amongst our membership of belonging to a MM they respect. However there is a marked difference in perception between east and west. And here we are on to a major topic with many views, many solutions and little agreement.

I hope this helps.