

Bristol Insight Meditation



Annual Report and Financial Statements

Year Ended 31 December 2020

About Bristol Insight Meditation

In this our sixth annual review we set out our charitable objectives and our activities to promote those objectives for public benefit.

Background information

In 2003, a small group of people who had been to retreats at Gaia House in Devon got together to support each other in their meditation practice – and Bristol Insight (originally named Bristol Gaia House Group) was born. Today, whilst our original, supportive intentions remain unchanged, that small group has grown organically into a peer-led registered charity - a network of over 350 people involved in a wide range of organised activities.

Our approach

At Bristol Insight Meditation, we support the practice and study of Buddhist Insight Meditation also known as Vipassana (literally translated as ‘seeing deeply or clearly’). This is the practice of developing a calm and mindful investigation into the nature of experience, leading to wisdom, compassion and the end of suffering. The Vipassana movement began in the Theravada schools of Buddhism in the early 20th century in Burma and Thailand, and attempts to reconnect with the teachings of early Buddhism. In its spread to the West, teachers such as Jack Kornfield and Christina Feldman integrated Vipassana with understandings from Western culture, while remaining true to the Buddha’s teachings.

It is from this group of pioneer Western teachers that centres such as Gaia House in Devon and Spirit Rock and IMS in the USA were formed. Bristol Insight Meditation has close links with Gaia House and draws inspiration from the wide range of teachers and teachings from the worldwide Insight meditation community. As well as Vipassana, some of us have practice backgrounds in traditions such as Quakerism or Tibetan and Zen Buddhism.

Our approach emphasises inquiry, experiential exploration and mindfulness amongst many other influences. It is not important to hold particular beliefs or to consider yourself to be a Buddhist to participate in our activities, all are welcome. What we do have in common is an interest in our own personal development as part of a supportive community. Ethical living is important to us too, including our collective responses to current social and environmental challenges.

Our aims and values

Through our groups and activities, we aspire to build a community that nurtures wisdom and compassion: for ourselves, for others and for the world we live in. We strive to be open to all and do not seek to convert or discriminate, irrespective of religious or political beliefs, ethnicity, gender, social background, age, sexual orientation or disability. We invite donations to cover our costs but our activities are open to everyone, irrespective of means.

What we do

We offer a range of activities to support meditation practice. Please visit our website: www.bristolmeditation.org.uk for full details. Our longstanding association with Gaia House, a well-known retreat centre for Insight Meditation, means we regularly invite their teachers, as well as those from other linked traditions, to lead our own retreat days and courses. These are reputable, highly experienced teachers who commit to a code of ethics. Our supporter-led charity is run by a small team of volunteers.

2020 Annual Review

Charitable Objective

To advance the education of the public in the subject of meditation and the teachings of the Buddha in particular but not exclusively by supporting and encouraging the study and practice of Buddhist Insight Meditation (also known as Vipassana meditative practice) for the benefit of people in Bristol and the surrounding areas.

Education

During the year we organised the following activities to promote education

- **Six Teacher Led Day Retreats**

These were facilitated by teachers associated with Gaia House Retreat Centre, Devon on a range of subjects, combining teaching and practice. In 2020 we had the following retreats:

- Venerable Canda - *'Contented and easily Satisfied'*
- Chris Cullen - *'Practising Wisdom and Compassion in Turbulent Times'*
- Jenny Wilks - *'Gratitude and Joy'*
- Yanai Postelnik – *'Love in the time of Extinction'*
- Kirsten Kratz - *'Stretching the Heart -Liberating the Heart'*
- Ramiro Ortega – *'The Power and Art of Slowing Down'*

Having these teachers come to Bristol Insight was greatly appreciated by us all.

Supporting practice

We provide a number of opportunities for people to support and develop their meditation practice through small group communities:

- Weekly evening sitting group, combining practice and discussion to support individual practice;
- Monthly daytime sitting group, combining practice and discussion to support individual practice;

- Monthly 'Self-led' day retreat, which provides alternative sitting and walking practice sessions, together with opportunities for discussion;
- Monthly nature meditations in open woodland;
- Monthly group to support focussing practice;
- Insightful ageing group;
- Book group to support practice;
- Occasional Sangha walks;
- A monthly newsletter with news and contributions from the sangha;
- A website that provides up to date information and links to bookings for our events.

All activities are publicised widely, including on our website and in our monthly email newsletter. Participants are requested to make donations to cover associated running costs, but low income is not a barrier to participation.

“Without community my practice would mean very little. I take delight in helping to run the Tuesday meditation group. This involves welcoming newcomers and overseeing the meditation and mindful sharing sessions. As we sit in a circle a deep sense of connection and community emerges. I’m also a member of the day retreats team helping to bring dharma teachers to Bristol for a day of practice for our wider community. It is deeply satisfying to work within a team to plan retreats, from the initial idea to organising the day itself and to know that many people have benefited.”

Some Highlights from 2020

Teacher Led Retreats

The Teacher Led Retreats team have worked hard over the last year to deliver 6 retreats which feels more manageable for the team. The retreats have reflected a rich variety of perspectives and practices within the Insight tradition. We had to move from the venue at Glenfrome School onto Zoom as from the March retreat due to Covid restrictions. By all accounts the retreats have been much appreciated during these strange and difficult times and provided access to some participants who can't make a day long in person. They have continued to be seen as an enrichment and valuable support for our practice.

Self Led Day Retreats

The self led retreat has continued to run monthly in 2020 and 2021. Since April 2020, the day retreats have been in peoples' own homes rather than at the Bristol venue. The structure of the day has remained like previous years. But an online Zoom meeting has been available to participants throughout the day.

Participants have been encouraged to adapt the structure of the day to meet their domestic requirements. The event has been free. Participants can join the day via a meeting link that is emailed to them. Along with a link to a Dharma talk for the month.

The same small team has successfully organised the retreats. Attendance has varied from about 7 to 14 participants throughout the year. Our provisional plan is to return to the Bristol venue from September.

Tuesday Evening Sitting Group

The weekly evening sit continued to thrive in an online format with many newcomers and a dedicated team of facilitators. Our "Cultivating our Practice" programme covered in-depth exploration of several Dharma topics – including the Noble Eightfold Path, The Five Aggregates, the Middle Way, Gratitude, and the Feminine in Buddhism. We also explored the contributions of the Thai teacher Ajahn Chah to the practice of contemporary meditation, the teachings of Stephen Lavine on insightful approaches to ageing and dying amongst many other themes. The group also listened to recordings of the spoken discourses of the Buddha and recorded talks of meditation teachers. These often formed the basis of lively discussion. We continued with our popular Poetry and Prose sessions. The group also continued to provide support for meditation practice both for beginners and those more experienced in meditation through its monthly Mindful Sharing sessions.

Focusing Group

Prior to the first lockdown the group was meeting once a month for 3 hours (10am-1pm), generally on the second Sunday of the month. The group shifted to meeting on Zoom at the end of

March last year and we met weekly every Sunday in April and May 2020. Since then and through the last year the group has met fortnightly.

We started meeting in-person once a month at Bristol Zen Dojo in April this year, alternating with Zoom meetings once a month – so there is currently a meeting every fortnight. The dojo has done a covid risk assessment and we follow the safety protocols they have developed. The in-person meetings have been well-attended. Average overall attendance (both zoom and in-person) has generally been in the range 6-10 people.

The group is open to anyone interested in Focusing, regardless of experience, and a number of people have joined the group since lockdown and had their first experiences of Focusing online. The group is offered on a dana (voluntary donation) basis by Gordon, but in practice most people attend freely, especially on Zoom.

Daytime Meditation and Sharing Group (formerly Daytime Sangha Group)

Four of the former regular members of the group have been meeting on Zoom about once a month over the last year – this has felt supportive to all concerned. It hasn't however felt appropriate to open these meetings more widely.

Sangha Walks

There were 8 local sangha walks last year between June and December. The walks were all in and around Bristol and accessible easily by public transport, car or bicycle to remove the need for lift sharing. Average attendance was about 6 people, and we followed covid safety protocols.

No walks happened in January, February and March due to the second lockdown. Walks re-started in April this year and we have had 3 walks since then – around Long Ashton, Stanton Drew, and The Lower Wye Valley. These walks have been very popular, with the Wye Valley walk attracting a record 24 people!

It is hoped to continue to have walks every 4-6 weeks through the rest of the year.

Sangha walks have been happening intermittently since the first walk in 2005. There has been an increase in the frequency and attendance on the walks in the last few years. Most of the walks have been led by Gordon and occasionally by a volunteer walk leader. Children and dogs are welcome on the walks and part of the walk is held in silence. We walk at a gentle pace and walks generally last for 2–4 hours and include a pub or picnic lunch during or at the end of the walk.

The sangha walks are open to anyone, and new people often come on the walks. Connections get made and new people get to hear of other group activities through conversation with sangha members on the walks.

Insightful Ageing Group

It was the shock of witnessing sickness, old age and death that moved the youthful Prince Siddharta Gautama (the future Buddha) to search for a way out of suffering. How to respond this challenge is the aim and subject matter of the Group.

We have been meeting monthly for over two years, firstly in peoples' homes and since lockdown via zoom. Each session has lasted two hours. Over the past year, we have worked systematically through two books. The first "A year to live" by Stepehen Levine focuses on how to live this year as if it were your last. The second By Ma Soeng, Ambrosia and Olendzki is entitled "Older and Wiser " and introduces classical Buddhist teachings on ageing, sickness and death. Discussion of the texts has been accompanied by practical meditation exercises. In the future, the intention is to focus more on meditative practices of relevance to the subject matter of ageing.

The group is fairly small, about seven or eight members and we would welcome expressions of interest from new people. As the issue of dealing with suffering is of relevance to people of all ages, not just older people, you do not have to be "old" to join and hopefully to gain insight on the challenges of living a mindful life.

Nature Meditation

This group started in June 2020 as an offshoot of the self-led group, when COVID-19 restrictions meant that only outdoor events were possible. We meet monthly on Sunday afternoons in some beautiful woods just outside Bristol. The retreats last three hours with periods of sitting and nature meditation practice followed by a facilitated sharing. In the winter, we had fires. Covered areas offer protection from the rain. Between 6-14 people attended every month. When 'rule of 6' was in force, we would break into smaller groups, each with its own facilitator. Nature meditation events were not held in November 2020 or from January to March 2021, in line with government guidance. The group recently celebrated its one year anniversary and plans to continue.

Charity Information

TRUSTEES

Michael Baker

Jonathan Edwards

Jocelyn James

Christine Elizabeth Ramsey-Wade

Alastair Wakely

Geoff Windle

Lesley Wye

LEGAL STATUS

Registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Charity No 1162182

FURTHER INFORMATION

Website: www.bristolmeditation.org.uk

BANKERS

The Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Independent scrutiny of accounts is not required where the gross income for the financial year is £25,000 or less.

Annual report of the trustees of Bristol Insight Meditation for the year ended 31 December 2020

1 Factual information

1.1 Structure

Bristol Insight Meditation ("Bristol Insight") is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (No: 1162182)

1.2 Object

The Object of the charity is:

To advance the education of the public in the subject of meditation and the teachings of the Buddha in particular but not exclusively by supporting and encouraging the study and practice of Buddhist Insight Meditation (also known as Vispassana meditative practice) for the benefit of people in Bristol and the surrounding areas.

1.3 Governance

The charity is managed by a group of Trustees. All trustees are required to be members (supporters) of Bristol Insight. Trustees are recruited on the basis of skills needs identified by the group of Trustees. A variety of methods is used to identify suitable candidates. Trustees are elected by the members (supporters) of the charity at the Annual General Meeting. Each year one third of the Trustees retires by rotation. The group of Trustees has the power to co-opt members during the year but these members must stand for election at the next Annual General Meeting. Trustees are given an induction pack containing key information about our organisation and on becoming a trustee. Trustees are encouraged to identify gaps in their knowledge, which are then addressed by briefings or other training delivered to some or all of the trustees as appropriate.

1.4 Management

The Committee of Trustees currently comprises 7 members and meets approximately 6 times a year. The Trustees are supported by 'organisers' who organise and support activities on an operational basis. Organisers report to the Trustee Committee. The charity was registered by the Charity Commission on 15 June 2015. Trustees serving during the year 2020 were:

Michael Baker (elected on 25 June 2016, re-elected 13 April 2019)

Gillian Bird (appointed 15 June 2015, elected 25 June 2016, resigned 7 July 2020)

Max Beseke (appointed 15 June 2015, elected 25 June 2016, resigned 7 July 2020)

Jonathan Edwards (appointed 15 June 2015, elected 25 June 2016, re-elected 7 July 2020)

Jocelyn James (elected 7 July 2020)

Christine Ramsey-Wade (elected 7 July 2020)

Alastair Wakely (elected 13 April 2019)

Geoff Windle (elected 13 April 2019)

Lesley Wye (elected 7 July 2020)

2 Review of Activities

The review of activities is set out in the 2020 Annual Review earlier in this report.

3 Financial Review

Total income for the year was £ 3,310.50 (2019: £8,050.25) and total expenditure for the year was £3,799.35 (2019: £8,170.30). Both income and expenditure were significantly reduced compared to the previous year as very few in-person events were held due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The total net assets held at 31st December 2020 were £4,617.77 (2019: £5,106.62) represented by cash at bank and in hand.

4 Risk Management

The major risks to which the charity is exposed, as identified by the trustees, have been reviewed during the year and the trustees are satisfied that systems have been established to mitigate those risks. The charity has arranged employers and public liability insurance cover of £10M through an insurance policy underwritten by the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group.

5 Format of financial statements

The report and accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Charities Act 2011

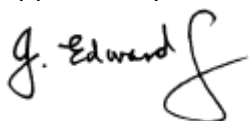
6 Trustees' responsibilities in relation to the financial statements

Legal regulations require the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the charity's financial activities for the year and of its financial position at the end of the year. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards and statements of recommended practice have been followed subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the Committee of Trustees and signed on their behalf by



Jonathan Edwards, Trustee and Treasurer

Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 December 2020


	Teacher Led Day Retreats & Admin	Self-Led & Nature Day Retreats	Tuesday Sitting & Introd Course	Teacher Led Courses	2020 Total	2019 Total
INCOME						
Voluntary Income						
Donations		£1,001.00	£852.00		£1,853.00	£5,082.67
Investment Income						
Bank Interest					£0.00	£0.00
From charitable activities						
Event booking fees	£1,457.50				£1,457.50	£2,967.58
Total Income	£1,457.50	£1,001.00	£852.00	£0.00	£3,310.50	£8,050.25
EXPENDITURE						
Cost of charitable activities						
Payments to Teachers	£240.00	£462.12			£702.12	£560.00
Hire of Halls & Venues	£101.25	£555.00	£1,092.00		£1,748.25	£5,506.63
Travel & Accommodation	£40.07				£40.07	£602.60
Admin Services	£825.00				£825.00	£765.00
Coffee, Tea, Biscuits	£13.80				£13.80	£131.64
Printing & Stationery	£15.00				£15.00	£51.00
Liability Insurance	£364.00				£364.00	£364.00
Website & IT	£91.11				£91.11	£71.93
Purchases					£0.00	£117.50
Total Expenditure	£1,690.23	£1,017.12	£1,092.00	£0.00	£3,799.35	£8,170.30
Net Movement of Funds	-£232.73	-£16.12	-£240.00	£0.00	-£488.85	-£120.05
Reconciliation of Funds						
Balance B/F at 1 Jan 2020					£5,106.62	£5,226.67
Net movement of Funds					-£488.85	-£120.05
Balance C/F at 31 Dec 2020					£4,617.77	£5,106.62

Balance Sheet at 31 December 2020

	2020	2019
Tangible Fixed Assets	£0.00	£0.00
Current Assets		
Cash at bank	£4,362.70	£4,752.75
Cash in PayPal account	£178.89	£178.89
Cash in hand	£76.18	£174.98
Net Current Assets	£4,617.77	£5,106.62
Net Assets	<u>£4,617.77</u>	<u>£5,106.62</u>
Represented by		
Unrestricted funds	£4,617.77	£5,106.62
Restricted funds		
Total Funds	<u>£4,617.77</u>	<u>£5,106.62</u>

Note: we have a credit of £672 with the Friends Central Meeting House for 16 Tuesday evening sessions prepaid but not used in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the Trustees on 13th July 2021 and signed on their behalf by



Jonathan Edwards
Trustee and Treasurer

Independent Examination

Independent scrutiny of accounts is not required where the gross income for the financial year is £25,000 or less.