

Bristol Insight Meditation



Annual Report and Financial Statements

Year Ended 31 December 2023

Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Registered Charity No 1162182

About Bristol Insight Meditation

In this our eighth 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.

2023 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 2023 all of the retreats took place in person at Glenfrome Primary School. We had the following retreats:

- Mark Ovland - Freedom Right Here: A Beginner's Guide to Meditation
- River Wolton - Impermanence: a doorway to peace?
- Zohar Lavie - Cultivating Wellbeing, Ease and Freedom
- Laura Bridgman – Knowledge from the present moment
- Mark Ovland - Dharma -fundamental questions on practice
- Jaya Rudgard – Natural Wellbeing - Cultivating samādhi through movement and stillness.

Two five week evening teacher led courses

These were facilitated by Mark Ovland and took place at the Central Quaker meeting house

- Spring - loving kindness
- Autumn - Ways of Looking

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 'Self-led' day retreat, which provides alternative sitting and walking practice sessions, together with opportunities for discussion;
- Monthly nature meditations in open woodland;
- Overnight camping meditation retreats for women in open woodland
- Monthly Insightful ageing group;
- Regular 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 2023

Teacher Led Retreats

The Teacher Led Retreats team have worked hard over the last year to deliver 6 retreats. The retreats have reflected a rich variety of perspectives and practices within the Insight tradition. We ran all of the retreats at our usual venue at Glenfrome School with no online retreats this year.

However, the numbers that have returned to in person are still lower than they were pre covid so we have actually made a loss on at least one of our led retreat days due to lower

numbers and having to cover the cost of hall hire, refreshments, travel and accommodation costs in comparison to just zoom fees being the only out going previously. We continue to ask for feedback from participants after each retreat, and a number have feedback that the online facility suited them as they live further afield.

Since Lesley took over the treasurer post we get regular updates regarding the Led Team finances which is helpful. We continue to run a structured booking system with two levels (early bird and tier 1) to try to encourage people to book on earlier and to endeavour to cover our costs. However, we also have a freely given option for people who have limited funds so as to be as inclusive as we can.

We continue to ask people to sign up for Gift Aid. Therefore, we are claiming back on a large number of the booking fees through this scheme. We need 25 people to attend in order to break even. We have now capped our accommodation budget at £30 for those teachers choosing to stay overnight in accommodation other than that offered by the team. We encourage teachers to book travel etc as early as possible to keep those costs to a minimum. Although we may make a loss on some retreat days, overall, we break even over the course of the year. There is a pot of profit which can act as a buffer if needs be. We have had quite a lot of new people attending these days which is encouraging.

Claire-Louise Symonds

Teacher led courses

In 2023 I ran two 5-week evening courses at the Central Quaker Meeting House. In the spring we explored loving-kindness practice, and in the autumn we took a dive into 'ways of looking', the approach to Insight Meditation developed by the late Rob Burbea. Both courses had 20+ signups, and most people attended at least 3 of the sessions. The autumn course was also followed up with a number of online drop-in sessions. The feedback suggests that this sort of continued guidance and group exploration over a period of time was greatly appreciated, and that people would welcome more (and longer) teacher-led courses in the future.

Mark Ovland

Self Led Day Retreats

The self-led retreats were well attended in the last year. We had between 8 and 15 participants approximately each Saturday. We kept the same popular structure of silent sitting and walking meditation periods. We included a one hour recorded Dharma talk and 1/2 hour sharing period. The day does not include any specific meditation instruction. Participants generally have some meditation experience.

The verbal feedback from participants is positive. They appreciate the opportunity to meditate for a whole day in a supportive atmosphere. Full details of the retreat can be found on the Bristol insight website.

The team of four organisers continue to volunteer their services. We have occasional short meetings to coordinate this. Some members of the team now wish step back. We have put out a call for new volunteers in person at retreat and on the website.

David Ringsell

Tuesday Evening Sitting Group

The weekly evening sit continues with in-person meetings at the Central Quaker Meeting House throughout 2023. Attendance for the meetings continues to be good with newcomers each week. Several of the newcomers have volunteered to become facilitators at the meetings. Our “Deepening our Practice” programme covered explorations of the relationship between meditation and ethics, neuroscience and early Buddhism, and sympathetic joy. The group also listened to recordings of the spoken discourses of the Buddha and recorded talks from meditation teachers. These often formed the basis of lively discussion. We continued with our popular Poetry and Prose sessions and brought back the Spiritual resource sharing sessions. Ending each quarter with socialising during our Chat Café 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.

Joss James

Focusing Group

We had one meeting in January, then after a break, the monthly in-person meetings re-started with a first meeting on Sunday 5th November and a further meeting on 17th December.

We have continued to meet monthly since then at our usual venue of Bristol Zen Dojo from 11am—2pm. Group attendance generally ranges from 6 to 12 people

The group is open to anyone interested in Focusing, regardless of experience, and we frequently have new people coming to the group. People give a donation towards covering the rental of the dojo and for my facilitation of the group.

Sangha Walks

There were 2 sangha walks in 2023 – in November, to the Llangattock Escarpment in South Wales, and in December to Bourton Combe, near Flax Bourton. Both walks were attended by 8 people. I intend to continue to have walks every 4-6 weeks throughout 2024. Walk leaders are welcome.

Sangha walks have been happening intermittently since the first walk in 2005 – we have had 80 walks in total since then. There has been an increase in the frequency and attendance on the walks in the last few years. We had 24 people for a Wye Valley walk a few years ago! Most of the walks have been led by Gordon and occasionally by a volunteer walk leader. Children and dogs are welcome on the walks (but remain the responsibility of the adults who brought them) 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

This group has been going for more than seven years. When it began, I wondered if it would last but it has in fact continued and thrived. The composition has changed over time, and it now has nine members who meet monthly for two hours. I would describe the group as friendly, supportive but serious in its aim to understand and support meditative practice in the context of ageing.

Sessions consist of a period of meditation plus a number of different activities. These include exploring readings on the subject of Buddhism and ageing; listening to readings from the dharma; sharing poetry; with opportunities to share issues that arise for members in their practice or more generally in life. We continued to work with Carmel Shalev's book "In Praise of Aging" for the first half of the year and chose different themes for the later groups. We meet in people's houses and there is always a possibility of new members joining.

Ray Woolfe

Nature Meditation

In 2023, we offered eleven Sunday afternoon nature meditation retreats with between 13-28 participants attending. Lasting about three hours with a variety of sitting, walking and nature practices, each retreat has a theme. For 2023, themes included: 'Just one thing' (concentration practice), 'Green' and 'Change with feeling tone'. In February 2023, we moved back permanently to Leigh Court Woods, as Wraxall Woods were no longer on lease.

Innovations this year included the highly popular retreat 'Writing in the Woods' combining writing and meditation offered by Michael Gregg, a frequent attendee. We also had celebration retreats on Summer Solstice ('Fire and light') and New Year's Day Eve ('Endings and Beginnings') where retreatants shared food after practising. Overall, nature meditation retreats continue to attract new participants while retaining a core of regular attenders. They appear to be highly valued.

Lesley Wye

Rewilding Women

2023 was the fourth year in which we offered overnight nature meditation retreats for women. This aim is to reconnect women with nature to deepen their practice and help the woods become a place of refuge, joy, nourishment and beauty.

This year, we provided five overnight weekend retreats of one- and two-night duration from the end of April til mid-Sept. All retreats took place in Wildflower Woods near Bruton. Between six to eight women attended each retreat. Themes included: 'Transition & Transformation', 'Reaping the Harvest' and 'Sowing the Seeds'. For the first time, we also offered optional sessions on writing poetry, plant identification and 'active hope'. These were very well received.

Women attending the retreats fed back how much they appreciated extended time to practice in the woods, enjoying all that nature offers. They often spoke of how nourishing the retreats are, not least because of the delicious vegan meals (that they didn't prepare!). For 2024, retreatants asked for a three-night retreat and to open up the retreats to those of any gender.

Lesley Wye

Charity Information

TRUSTEES

Jocelyn James

Christine Elizabeth Ramsey-Wade

Lesley Wye

Morag Rose Ruffell

Maddy Longley

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 2023

1 Factual information

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 comprised 5 members and met approximately 6 times a year. The Trustees are supported by 'organisers' who organise and support activities on an

operational basis. The charity was registered by the Charity Commission on 15 June 2015. Trustees serving during the year 2023 were:

Jocelyn James (elected 7 July 2020, re-elected 25 September 2023)
Barbara Kenny (elected 7 July 2020, resigned 25 September 2023)
Christine Ramsey-Wade (elected 7 July 2020, re-elected 25 September 2023)
Heather - now known as Morag Rose Ruffell (elected 14 Sept 2022)
Lesley Wye (elected 7 July 2020; re-elected 14 Sept 2022)
Riley Yin Au (elected 14 Sept 2022, resigned 25 September 2023)
Maddy Longley (elected 25 September 2023)

2. Review of Activities

The review of activities is set out in the 2023 Annual Review earlier in this report.

3 Financial Review

Total income for the year was £15,919.51 (2022: £5,221) and total expenditure for the year was £12,478.49 (2022: £5,618). The total net assets held on 31st December 2023 were £7,655.61 (2022: £4,878.65) represented by cash at bank.

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 Zurich.

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.

Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 December 2023

INCOME	Teacher Led Day retreat	Self-led	Tues sit	Courses	Rewilding	Nature Meditation	TOTAL 2023	TOTAL 2022
Donations	2,593.10	2,161	3,581.50	685	3,640	797	£13,457.60	£5,221
Gift Aid 2019-2022		471.60	705.90				£1,177.50	
Gift Aid 2023	349.40	406.25		50	478.75		£1,284.41	
TOTAL	£2,942.50	£3,038.86	£4,287.40	£735	£4,118.75	£797	£15,919.51	£5,221

EXPENDITURE	Teacher Led Day retreat	Self-led	Tues sit	Courses	Rewilding	Nature Meditation	TOTAL 2023	TOTAL 2022
Venue Hire	-660	-1,854.06	-3,675.60	-395	-1,118.67	-140	-£7,631.48	-£3894
Food & drink	-46.39				-708.36	-40	-£794.75	
Catering					-1,025		-£1,025	
Travel & accommodation	-262.97				-295.80		-£558.86	-£103.29
Admin	-690						-£690	-£697.50
Purchases			-162.85		-595.63	-46.13	-£804.41	-£2.65
Printing	-30						-£30	-£28
Insurance	-100.80	-20.20	-20.20		-20.20		-£161.40	-£364
Website	-59.99	-15	-15		-15		-£104.99	-£79.17
Refunds		-7.50			-230		-£237.50	-£375
Transfers		-90.01	-14			-31	-£135.01	-£10
Training						-150	-£150	

Donations		-155.09					-£155.09	-£64.39
TOTAL	-£1,850.15	-£2,141.86	-£3,675.60	-£395	-£4008.75	-£407.13	-£12,478.49	£5,618

Balance Sheet at 31 December 2023

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Tangible Fixed Assets				
Current Assets				
Cash at bank	4226.58	4623.58	4362.70	4752.75
Cash in PayPal account	197.84	178.89	178.89	178.89
Cash in hand	60.25	76.18	76.18	174.98
Net Current Assets	4484.67	4878.65	4617.77	5106.62
Net Assets	4484.67	4878.65	4617.77	5106.62
Unrestricted funds	4484.67	4878.65	4617.77	5106.62
Restricted funds				
Total Funds	4484.67	4878.65	4617.77	5106.62

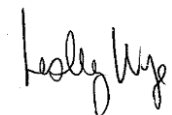
BANK BALANCES

TEACHER LED DAY RETREAT	£2,148.66
SELF LED	£1,945.60
TUES SIT	£1,532.31
COURSES	£1,382.17
OUTDOOR MEDITATION	£646.87
TOTAL	£7,655.61

RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS

ASSETS		2023	2022	2021
BALANCE AT 1 JAN		£4,214.59	£4854.65	£4,617.77
NET MOVEMENT		£3,441.02	-£640.06	£236.88
BALANCE AT 31 DEC		£7,655.61	£4,214.59	£4,854.65

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the Trustees on 18 April 2024 and signed on their behalf by



Lesley Wye

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.