

Bristol Insight Meditation



Annual Report and Financial Statements Year Ended 31 December 2024

**Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Registered Charity No 1162182**

About Bristol Insight Meditation

In this ninth 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.

2024 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:

Four teacher-led day retreats:

- Martine Bachelor - Mindfulness of Feeling Tone
- Venerable Canda - Liberating Perspectives on Death & Dying
- Mark Ovland – The Breath Reimagined
- Jane Cutler - Investigation on Spiritual Friendship for your community

One five-week teacher-led course:

- The Meditator's Toolkit (Taught by Mark Ovland in spring at Quaker Meeting House)

One introductory course:

- We ran a four-week introduction to insight meditation course in the autumn of 2024, led by Joss James and Mike Baker

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 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
- A WhatsApp group for the Sangha

All activities are publicised widely, including on our website, in the WhatsApp group, 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."

Highlights from 2024

Teacher-Led Retreats (Claire-Louise Symonds)

We facilitated 4 teacher-led day retreats in 2024. These were facilitated by teachers associated with Gaia House Retreat Centre, Devon, on a range of subjects, combining teaching and practice. In 2024, one retreat was online and all of the other retreats took place in person at

Glenfrome Primary School. We had to cancel one retreat as the teacher was not able to run at the last minute. So we had the following retreats:

- Martine Bachelor - Mindfulness of Feeling Tone
- Venerable Canda - Liberating Perspectives on Death & Dying
- Mark Ovland – The Breath Reimagined
- Jane Cutler - Investigation on Spiritual Friendship for your community

The Teacher Led Retreats team have worked hard over the last year to organise 5 retreats (one was cancelled at the last minute because the teacher couldn't run it), which feels more manageable for the team. The retreats have reflected a rich variety of perspectives and practices within the Insight tradition. We tend to run one online retreat each year to be accessible to a wider group of participants and to attract teachers who are not able to travel to Bristol.

The in-person retreats took place at our usual venue at Glenfrome School. Numbers are steadily growing again but are still a bit lower than they were pre-Covid. We now have a four-tiered system of tickets that is working better to cover our costs.

We continue to ask for feedback from participants after each retreat, and a number have fed back 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 have made a large profit over the last few years. The team decided to donate an extra amount to each teacher at the end of 2024 so there wasn't a surplus in the account.

We continue to run a structured booking system with four levels (early bird and tier 1, waged and unwaged) 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 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. Many teachers are now choosing to travel to Bristol and back on the same day as our day retreats finish at 4pm rather than 5pm. This saves on the accommodation costs quite considerably.

We have had quite a lot of new people attending these days which is encouraging.

Introductory course (Joss James, Mike Baker)

We ran a four-week introduction to insight meditation course in the autumn of 2024 at the Central Quaker Meeting House, led by Joss James and Mike Baker. The maximum of 12 participants signed up most of whom attended regularly. Feedback from the course was very positive, with those who were new to practise as well as those who'd come to establish a more regular practise benefitting. Further regular courses will be run in 2025, facilitator and premises permitting.

Teacher-Led Courses (Mark Ovland)

In May 2024 I ran a 4-week evening course at the Central Quaker Meeting House called the Meditator's Toolkit. Over the weeks we practised various skills that a meditator can find helpful, including adjusting the direction, intensity, and width of one's awareness, and working with difficulties in the bodily experience. We had 20 signups and the majority of people attended at least 3 sessions. Feedback was positive, with a request for more teacher-led courses in the future.

Self-Led Day Retreats (David Ringsell)

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. They select a meditation style that works for them. The day starts with a clear introduction to the meditation schedule.

The verbal feedback from participants is positive. They appreciate the opportunity to meditate for a whole day in a supportive atmosphere. The talk and sharing sessions are also valued. Full details of the retreat can be found on the Bristol Insight website.

The team of organisers continue to volunteer their services including David and Caroline. When they are not available, Tony has facilitated the retreat. We have occasional short meetings and emails to coordinate this.

Tuesday Evening Sitting Group (Jonathan Edwards)

During 2024 the weekly evening sit met every Tuesday at the Central Quaker Meeting House (except 2nd January and 24th & 31st December). Weekly attendance ranged between 8 and 22 practitioners, averaging out at 14, with several new people joining the group during the year. The evening starts with a round of names, where each person's name is repeated back by the Sangha to recognise and appreciate the presence of each person. There is a space for our "Caring Sangha" where we bring to mind a person, or group of people, who may be suffering, or maybe we bring something in our life to share and celebrate with the Sangha. This is followed by a 40-minute unguided silent meditation session, after which for 20 minutes we appreciate

each others company whilst enjoying a cup of tea. In the "second half" of the evening we have our "Deepening our Practice" programme of practices, studies, and activities. During 2024 this included a monthly "Mindful Sharing", quarterly "Poetry & Prose" sharing, mindful walking, mindful movements, and mindful joy, chanting, listening to, and reflecting on, some of the suttas and studying various aspects of the Buddha's teachings including the three refuges, the four Noble Truths and Anatta, and reflecting on formal versus informal practice. We end each quarter with a social "Chat Café" evening. A special session was held on 30 January to celebrate 20 years of Bristol Insight.

Focusing Group (Gordon Adam)

The focusing group has been taking place on Sundays throughout the year.

Sangha Walks (Gordon Adam)

There were 8 sangha walks in 2024:

North Stoke & Kelston

Shipham and Mendips

Ebbor Gorge

Black Mountains

Uley Bury Hill Fort

Clevedon

Bradford on Avon

Blaise Castle

Sangha walks have been happening intermittently since the first walk in 2005 – we have had over 80 walks in total since then. 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 (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 (Meg Hunter)

This group has been going for more than eight years. When it began, we 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 another activity such as exploring readings on the subject of Buddhism and ageing; listening to readings from the dharma; sharing poetry; with a brief opportunity for us all to share issues that arise for members if individuals want to share but no obligation to do so. We are currently coming to the end of the book, *Five Invitations - What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully* by Frank Ostaseski. Frank is a Buddhist teacher and leader in contemplative end-of-life care. We have found this inspiring and would thoroughly recommend this book to others.

We meet in people's houses and there is always a possibility of new members joining.

Nature Meditation (Lesley Wye)

In 2024, we offered nine Sunday afternoon nature meditation retreats with between 7-20 participants attending. Lasting about three hours with a variety of sitting, walking and nature practices, each retreat has a theme. For 2024, themes included: 'Equanimity: this too belongs', 'Letting go', and 'Sense-foraging'.

Increasingly, members of the nature meditation sangha are leading the retreats. Morag Ruffell led the April retreat on 'Abundance' and Michael Gregg led the March retreat on 'Writing in the Woods'.

Three retreats included the sharing of delicious vegan food (June, Nov and Dec) and we had our first night time retreat on 1 Nov with the theme of 'Honouring the Ancestors'.

Overall, nature meditation retreats continue to attract new participants while retaining a core of regular attenders. They appear to be highly valued.

Rewilding Retreats (Lesley Wye)

2024 was the fifth year in which we offered overnight nature meditation retreats. The aim is to reconnect with nature to deepen practice so that the woods become a place of refuge, joy, nourishment and beauty.

This year, we held four overnight weekend retreats of one-, two- and three- night duration from the end of April until mid-Sept. All retreats took place in Wildflower Woods near Bruton.

Between four to eight practitioners attended each retreat. Themes included: 'Welcoming the New', 'Listening to the Heart; Listening to the Land' and 'Rest, Release, Renewal'.

Two retreats were cancelled; one because of low numbers (LBGTQ+ in July) and one because of adverse weather (June).

For the first time, a retreat was open to all, including men, which was a great success. We also offered our first three night retreat in August, which went well. Some retreats continued to include optional sessions on writing and mindful art. These were very well received. Those attending the retreats fed back how much they appreciated extended time to practice in the woods, enjoying all that nature offers. These retreats will continue for 2025.

Charity Information

Legal Status

The charity was registered by the Charity Commission on 15 June 2015 as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
Charity No 1162182

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 Vispassana meditative practice) for the benefit of people in Bristol and the surrounding areas.

Further Information

Website: www.bristolmeditation.org.uk

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.

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.

Trustees serving during the year 2024 were:

Jocelyn James (elected 7 July 2020, re-elected 25 September 2023)

Christine Ramsey-Wade (elected 7 July 2020, re-elected 25 September 2023)

Morag Rose Ruffell (elected 14 Sept 2022, re-elected 17 April 2024)

Lesley Wye (elected 7 July 2020; re-elected 14 Sept 2022)

Maddy Longley (elected 25 September 2023)

Financial Review

Total income for the year was £13,748.87 (2023: 15,919.51) and total expenditure for the year was £14,387.20 (2023: 12,478.49). The total net assets held at 31st December 2024 were £7,017.38 represented by cash at bank.

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.

Format of financial statements

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

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.

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.

Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 December 2024

INCOME	Day retri	Selfled	Tues sit	Cours es	Rewild Med	Nat Med	TOTAL 2024	TOTAL 2023
Dona- tions	2052.5	1638.81	3051.51	560.0 1	4014.26	790.50	£12,107.58	£13,457.60
Gift Aid 2023						76.66	£76.66	£2,461.91
Gift Aid 2024	155	238.01	304.67		617.80	74.25	£1,389.73	
Internal Transfer	175						£175	
TOTAL	2382.5	1876.82	3356.17	560.0 1	4632.06	941.45	£13,748.97	£15,919.51

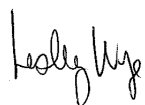
EXPENDITURE	Day retreat	Selfled	Tues sit	Courses	Rewild Med	Nat Med	TOTAL 2024	TOTAL 2023
Venue Hire	-230	-2171.18	-3325	-520	-1100	-340	-£7,686.18	-£7,631.48
Food & drink		-11.95			-531.39	-40.50	-£583.84	-£794.75
Catering					-1051.67		-£1,051.67	-£1,025
Travel & accom	-94				-142.48	-27	-£263.48	-£558.86
Admin	-667.50						-£667.50	-£690
Purchases	-109	-9	-9		-320.79	-7	-£454.79	-£804.41
Printing	-33	-11	-11				-£55	-£30
Insurance	-100.8	-25.20	-25.20		-25.20		-£176.40	-£161.40
Website	-103.18	-25.80	-25.80		-25.80		-£180.58	-£104.99
Refund & xfer		-21			-610	-7	-£638	-£372.51
Donations *	-1500	-100			-862.17	-167.59	-£2,629.76	-£155.09
TOTAL	-2837.48	-2375.13	-3396	-520	-4669.50	-589.09	-£14,387.20	-£12,478.49

*Donations = Dana for dharma teachers, Dharmaseed & Wildflower Woods infrastructure, as per agreement with trustees.

Balanced and net movement of funds

Activity	Balance 01-Jan-24	Income	Expenditure	Net movement	Balance 31-Dec-24
Day retreats	£2,148.66	£2,382.50	-£2,837.48	-£454.98	£1,693.68
Self-Led	£1,945.60	£1,876.82	-£2,375.13	-£498.31	£1,447.29
Tues Sit	£1,532.31	£3,356.17	-£3,396	-£39.83	£1,492.48
Courses	£1,382.17	£560.01	-£520	£40.01	£1,422.18
Rewilding Meditation	£646.87	£4,632.06	-£4,669.50	-£37.44	£609.43
Nature meditation	0	£941.41	-£589.09	£352.32	£352.32
Total	£7,655.61	£13,748.97	-£14,387.20	-£638.23	£7,017.38

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



Lesley Wye, Trustee and Treasurer