



Guide No. 5 **Disposing of unwanted books**

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1. Introduction

From time to time, most meetings will have to make decisions on which books to keep in the library and which to discard. The reasons are varied. The existing books may be outdated, and not very relevant to the needs of the meeting. Books that look tired and worn may be making the library look unappealing and discourage use. Often the library faces space restrictions which make it necessary to rationalise the stock. Some meetings feel they cannot properly look after a collection of older books, and would prefer them to be in a library that can provide the correct physical conditions and expertise. Whatever the reason, it is important that book disposal is done in a systematic and ordered way.

Before you reach the stage of having a pile of unwanted books to dispose of, two things should have happened – you should have first made the decision to withdraw them from the meeting library, and you should then have gone through a formal withdrawal procedure.

2. Deciding which books to withdraw from the meeting library

When deciding what books to withdraw from the meeting library it helps to have a set of criteria as guidance. If you have a policy on what subjects the meeting library covers this can form the basis of your withdrawals criteria.

Some commonly applied criteria for withdrawing books from libraries:

- contents are substantially or misleadingly out of date
- badly physically damaged, defaced, dirty or worn out
- later editions of the same book are held
- presentation and 'look' are outdated and there are better alternatives
- book hasn't been used for a long time and doesn't reflect or meet the needs or interests of the meeting
- no historical value

- foreign language book (unless there is a specific demand)
- duplicate (unless it is a popular book)

If the meeting has been informed of (or even decided) the library collection policy and withdrawals criteria, it will make your job of deciding what to withdraw easier.

After the meeting librarian has made an initial assessment of what to withdraw, the meeting or at least individual Friends with an interest in the library should be consulted for a second opinion. Others may remember that some books have a special association with the meeting, or that they could still be useful if Friends knew they were in the library.

Great care should be taken before disposing of books which have any sort of condition attached to them. If the books were bequeathed to the meeting, then it is important to establish that the meeting has the authority to dispose of them.

3. Withdrawals procedure

A withdrawals procedure certifies the book is no longer part of the meeting library and makes it clear it has been properly withdrawn so it can be disposed of.

The procedure should include the following elements:

- If the book was a bequest or gift, make sure the meeting has the authority to dispose of it.
- Make sure any catalogue entries are removed from the library catalogue.
- Keep a record of what has been withdrawn. This includes making a note in the accessions register.
- Indicate on the book itself that it has been withdrawn, with the date of withdrawal. This could simply be written in, or if you prefer using a withdrawals stamp. Either way, it should be somewhere that won't greatly disfigure the book, such as on the back of the title page, inside the front cover or over an existing bookplate or stamp.
- Minute that the books have been withdrawn and are to be disposed of as appropriate.

Following a procedure like this will remove any future misunderstandings that may arise about ownership, right to sell, etc.

4. Disposing of unwanted books

Having withdrawn the books from the library, the question now arises of how to dispose of them. There are two options, other than throwing away – donation or sale. Both can be time-consuming, but rewarding. You can have the satisfaction of knowing your books have found a 'good home', or raising a small sum of money that can be re-invested in the meeting library.

Sometimes there is no option but to throw a book away because it is in such a poor state of repair, or its contents are so out of date or misleading. This is especially

true of modern paperbacks. If you just cannot find another home for it, recycling may sometimes be the only option left.

5. Donations of unwanted books

Never send your unwanted books to another library unsolicited; always make contact first. It is a good idea to produce a list of the books you are offering. More than likely the first thing most libraries will ask if you offer books to them is “Can you send me a list?” The list should include author, title, and date/edition. It is also helpful to include a note about condition especially if a book is damaged, for example detached boards or torn pages.

When circulating a list to several libraries, always specify a date for responding, make it clear the books will go to the first library to respond, and decide who will be responsible for arranging and paying for delivery.

Where to offer donations

To members of the meeting

In the case of discarded books of little or no financial value, it can be a good solution to offer them to members of the meeting.

Library of the Society of Friends, Friends House

The first place to contact when offering discarded Quaker books should be the Library at Friends House. While it holds a nearly comprehensive collection of Quaker printed material, there are occasional gaps. As always, do not send books unsolicited, but contact the Library first with information about what you are offering.

It is especially important to contact the Library if you are discarding early Quaker books. As the Society’s official library and archive, the Library aims to have a complete collection of this material, and may be able to offer advice.

Quaker collections in university libraries

There are also collections of Quaker books in the following university libraries:

University of Birmingham, Cadbury Library (Woodbrooke collection)

University of Bradford

University of Essex

University of Hull

University of Lancaster

University of Leeds, Brotherton Library

University of Manchester, John Rylands Library

Quaker collections in Ireland

In Ireland, there are the Friends Historical Library of Ireland Yearly Meeting and the Philip B. Wilson Library, Craigavon Museum Services, Co. Armagh.

If one of these institutions with Quaker collections is near to you and you would like the books to remain in the region, then you may prefer to offer them there first.

Contact details are available on the British Quakers’ website:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/library/useful-links>.

Other Quaker meeting libraries

Other Quaker meeting libraries may be looking to fill gaps in their collections. A few meetings have strong collections of early Quaker books, which they are developing as a research resource for local Friends.

One of the easiest ways of contacting other meeting librarians is through the Quaker Meeting Librarians Cluster (see [further advice](#) below for information about joining the cluster). Don't send a list of books as an attachment to an email to the group, but offer them on request, or if you are offering only a few books then include the details in the body of your message.

It is strongly advised that if disposing of any Quaker book printed before 1900 you first offer it to other Quaker libraries and collections, as it may be a rare title.

Non-Quaker destinations

If any of the books have a local interest, e.g. a history of Quakers in the area, or the memoirs of a local Quaker, your public library or local studies library may be interested.

Saleable books of no particular historical value or rarity could be offered to local charity shops.

Targeting your offers

If you have time, then you could sort the books and target your offers to libraries most likely to be interested. If any of the books have a geographic interest, e.g., related to the history of a particular locality, or the biography of a Quaker prominent in a particular field or profession, you could offer to libraries in that region. Or if you have a number of books on a particular subject, you could offer them to a library with specialist collections in that field, such as University of Bradford, which has a strong peace studies collection.

6. Selling unwanted books

You may have arrived at the decision to sell books that are no longer wanted by the meeting. Generally speaking, few Quaker books are likely to fetch a very high price from a bookseller or at auction. Exceptions include some books and pamphlets with substantial historical interest at local or national level, a few first editions, and items which belonged to a well-known figure or have an interesting provenance (indicated either by supporting documentation, bookplate, owner's signature or manuscript annotations to the text). Condition will also influence the value.

Rarity and historical value does not necessarily equate to high monetary value; whilst a very early Quaker tract may have enormous historical interest to Quakers and historians it doesn't necessarily mean it has a high value on the open market. Increasingly antiquarian booksellers sell their books via the internet, and checking their websites can give some indication of market value. Two important points to bear in mind are that the condition and associations of a particular volume are key

determinants of its value, and that booksellers' prices are asking prices, which are higher than the prices a buyer might pay.

Some multi-dealer websites for second-hand and rare books include:

- Abe Books www.abebooks.co.uk
- Biblio <https://biblio.co.uk/>
- International League of Antiquarian Booksellers www.ilab.org

A book should not be withdrawn for sale simply because it is believed to have a monetary value.

Disposing of Quaker books by selling them is a sensitive issue, which may be controversial within the meeting. It is important to do it with care, to have gone through a proper process of withdrawing the books (see above) and have the agreement of the meeting to sell. Done properly, selling unwanted books is a legitimate method of disposal.

If the meeting will allow it, re-invest the proceeds of a book sale back into the meeting library to help re-invigorate the library. You could use the proceeds to buy new books, new shelves or display equipment to improve the arrangement and presentation of the library. Or you could have some books re-bound or repaired.

There are three main ways of selling books:

- direct book sales
- sale to book dealers and antiquarian booksellers
- sale through auction houses.

Direct book sales

Selling books directly, perhaps in a table-top sale, is suitable for books in poor condition, with a low value and of no rarity. You should not expect to charge much for each book: the bonus is disposing of books in a constructive way.

Selling to book dealers and antiquarian booksellers

The best way of finding a bookseller is by personal recommendation. Failing this, consult a directory of antiquarian and second-hand book dealers. There are several directories; none is completely comprehensive, but two of the best are *Sheppard's Book Dealers in the British Isles*, now online <https://www.sheppardsworld.co.uk/>, and the Antiquarian Booksellers Association, searchable on-line at <https://aba.org.uk/>.

If you have not dealt with a book dealer before, it is probably wise to contact more than one and compare valuations. Check they are a member of a professional association, such as the Antiquarian Booksellers Association, and so obliged to follow its code of good practice.

The advantage of selling to a dealer is that there are no additional costs, such as seller's fee, but they may want to "cherry pick" only books they think they can sell.

Selling by auction

There are many regional auction houses, and many now hold sales devoted to books. There are also several book auctioneers who specialise in antiquarian and rare printed books. Again, directories such as *Sheppard's* will list them.

Most auction houses will either hold free valuation days or arrange to visit and give a valuation, but when selling you will have to pay a seller's commission. This is typically between 12.5% and 15% of the hammer price (the price at which the item is sold at auction).

Whether dealing with a bookseller or auction house make sure that the terms of business are fully understood.

7. Further advice

For further advice please contact the Library at Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. Phone 020 7663 1135. Email library@quaker.org.uk.

Join the Quaker Meeting Librarians Cluster for email discussion with other meeting librarians. Email library@quaker.org.uk to register.

Other leaflets in this series to download from <https://www.quaker.org.uk/meeting-librarians>

1. The Role of the Meeting Librarian
2. Selection and acquisition of stock
3. Cataloguing and arranging the meeting library
4. Equipment for a meeting library
5. Disposing of unwanted books
6. Caring for your books
7. Promoting the meeting library
8. Online resources for meeting librarians

Disaster preparedness: guidance for meeting librarians, clerks and custodians of records (Guides for custodians of records, no. 10)

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