

THE FRIENDS RELIEF SERVICE AND DISPLACED PEOPLE IN
EUROPE AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR, 1945–48*

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ABSTRACT

From 1945–48 the Friends Relief Service (FRS) cared for refugees, displaced people and expellees in post-war Germany. Not all FRS members were Quakers but all were committed to the belief that humanitarian work was an expression of Christian commitment. This set Quaker relief apart from the new, highly professionalised model being pioneered by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). FRS work has been neglected because of the historiographical focus upon UNRRA. Yet accounts by FRS workers indicate that, despite many compromises and shortcomings, their belief system enabled them to provide a crucial and unique type of relief service in the aftermath of war.

KEYWORDS

Friends Relief Service, war relief work, Quakers, displaced people, UNRRA, Second World War.

In July 1945 Francesca Wilson was a welfare officer in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). She was posted to the displaced persons' (DP) camp at Föhrenwald, near Wolfsfrathausen, in the US zone of Germany.¹ Wilson was an experienced relief worker: she had been involved in Quaker relief programmes since 1916, and had enthusiastically joined UNRRA when it was established in November 1943 because she thought that a professional, well-organised body would achieve much more than a voluntary organisation. Yet by July 1945, a few weeks after her arrival in Germany, she was starting to feel some doubts. Wilson was charged with clearing Föhrenwald camp of ex-enemies, in line with UNRRA's remit which was to provide care only to citizens of the Allied nations. This policy meant that Yugoslavs, *Volksdeutsche* and Hungarians were expelled from Föhrenwald camp.² Wilson was concerned because these expellees were in a desperate condition and she did not know what would happen to them. She knew that Quaker teams would have taken care of

them, regardless of their political status, but there were no Quaker teams in the American zone. 'I thought wistfully of the humane, anonymous, quietly efficient Quaker workers', she wrote, 'we needed them'.³

Wilson considered that the Quakers were needed for two reasons. At a practical level, they would support those who had been rejected by UNRRA. Yet her words also indicate that she missed some less tangible qualities too: the 'humane, anonymous, quietly efficient' Quakers were *qualitatively* different from her UNRRA colleagues. It was not simply the relief they provided, it was the way in which they provided it that mattered to Wilson. Was Wilson just being sentimental? Or did the Quakers develop a distinctive type of ethic for relief work in post-war Europe?

We will look at the ethics of Quaker relief work by analysing the writings of relief workers in British Quaker-organised teams during the years immediately following the Second World War, focussing largely on Friends Relief Service (FRS) Team 124 which was formed in June 1945. It was initially composed of five men and seven women, and the team worked first in Holland and then in Goslar (Germany).⁴ In July 1947 all teams were re-allocated following the withdrawal of UNRRA, and FRS 124 moved to Schleswig until the spring of 1948 when all FRS teams were disbanded and the remaining relief operations were taken over by the Friends Service Council.⁵ The original 12 did not remain together the entire time: a total of 27 people actually served in FRS 124 throughout this period, including three American Friends.⁶ This team is of particular interest as two of its members—Margaret McNeill and Elizabeth Bayley (later Sullivan)—have left considerable personal papers concerning their work, which have not featured in previous studies, and McNeill also published a semi-fictional autobiographical memoir.⁷ In 1945 McNeill was 36 years old and an experienced refugee worker who had initially come into contact with Friends when working with refugees from Nazi Germany. She remained a humanitarian activist her entire life and later became a significant figure on the Ulster Peace and Service Committee during the 'troubles'. Bayley was aged only 25 and was less experienced than McNeill although she had worked for the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (COBSRA) before joining the FRS.⁸ By focussing on Bayley and McNeill we make some attempt to address the historiographical neglect of female humanitarians.⁹ Moreover, Bayley and McNeill's accounts are especially illuminating in that the two women were writing separate accounts of the same events at the same time and in the same place. They were both aware of this and they both feature in each other's diaries. Taken together they highlight shared experiences and different emphases: they are both subjective and collective. These stories went on to furnish McNeill's journalism and her fiction and so they had a clear practical value. They also served an emotional purpose as both women struggled to make sense of their own lives and the lives of the DPs.

We also consider the accounts of other Quaker relief workers, plus commentaries in *The Friend*, the Quakers' weekly magazine, which was published throughout the Second World War and after. These texts record the practical day-to-day realities of FRS welfare workers and their attendant moral choices. In

the DP camps of post-war Europe Quakers had to live and work with the civilian victims of war but also with those who made war or who gained from war: the soldiers, the collaborators and the profiteers. These were the points at which Quaker values were sometimes sorely tested and compromises were demanded. Our aim here is not to write a history of policy but to begin a social history of relief work and to highlight the Quaker social-cultural milieu.¹⁰

The issue of a distinct Quaker identity can be a thorny one, and the historiography of the whole Quaker movement has been accused of being marred by a 'perceived group distinctiveness'.¹¹ So it is important to emphasise that not all members of the FRS were Quakers and not all Quaker relief workers operated within the FRS. Moreover, relief workers from all organisations often shared a similar outlook and found value in the 'spirit' of relief work rather than in its more tangible results.¹² There were two Quakers in the UNRRA team stationed in Goslar and many members of UNRRA were either Christians or were clearly inspired by Christian values.¹³ McNeill became head of FRS 124 but she was a Presbyterian and did not become a Quaker until the 1960s. Nevertheless she happily referred to herself in her journal as one of 'the Quakers'. FRS workers were routinely described as either 'Quakers' or 'Friends', whatever their religious convictions, and this caused no conflict because members felt that they 'belonged' to the Quakers. In McNeill's words, 'Never did I appreciate so keenly the value of belonging to a definite group of people'.¹⁴ In the pages that follow, we will therefore use the term 'Quaker' to indicate participation in a Quaker-run organisation, which did not necessarily imply membership of the Religious Society of Friends.

Long before the war was over, Allied authorities and relief agencies recognised that there would be massive humanitarian crises when the hostilities ended. The years after the First World War had been marked by a serious influenza epidemic and repeated refugee crises, especially acute in the zones where old empires had collapsed.¹⁵ A new cycle of refugee crises then began in the 1930s and traumatic population movements continued in Eastern Europe during the war.¹⁶ The end of the war only served to exacerbate this situation and as the Third Reich collapsed, it left behind all those who had been forcibly moved as a result of Nazi policies: the *Volksdeutsche*; forced labourers, sent in to maintain the Nazi war-machine; women from occupied Europe who had been placed in brothels to serve the soldiers of the German Reich; still-surviving victims of the concentration camps; kidnapped children who had been brought in as 'racially pure' stock; conscripts, like the Balts, who were serving in the German army; Cossacks and Ukrainians who had decided that their chances were better under Hitler than under Stalin. The list could go on: this vast, heterogeneous multitude was swollen further by the defeated German soldiers. Many millions were frantic to go home, others were desperate to make a new home and some simply wanted to flee danger and disorder. It is difficult to count all these people accurately, but there is a general consensus that about seven million civilians were on the move in the immediate aftermath of the German surrender, and this figure reaches over ten million when the defeated troops and prisoners of war are included.¹⁷

Who would be responsible for all these people? They could not just be ignored because the Allied military authorities did not want refugees and displaced people hindering their advance into the collapsing Third Reich. In addition, it was clearly impossible to re-establish any government unless these people were housed and fed. It was initially expected that the dynamic new organisation, UNRRA, would be able to deal with the issue by itself, yet in practice UNRRA relied heavily on the contribution of older, charitable bodies, many of which we would now describe as 'faith-based organisations'.¹⁸ The FRS was a classic example of the faith-based organisation. Roger Wilson, the FRS Travelling Commissioner in Europe, insisted that 'The Society is not a relief organisation. It is a branch of the Christian church' and its clear priority was to 'the worship of God and the bringing of men to His footstool'.¹⁹ However, while it is tempting to contrast the highly professionalised UNRRA with the older, religiously inspired charities (and FRS members consistently made such comparisons), secular and faith-based relief organisations are not 'polar opposites'.²⁰ Quakers themselves recognised that the link between religion and relief work was not straightforward and a Friends Service Council report of 1950 stressed that 'we deceive ourselves if we imagine that the feeding of the hungry or the clothing of the naked is a specifically religious, let alone a specifically Christian act'.²¹ Despite the long history, and the continued prevalence, of faith-based humanitarianism there has so far been little academic research into the subject.²² In response, this study provides some insight into the relationship between religion and practical relief work.

THE HISTORY OF QUAKER RELIEF WORK

Quakers have a long history of involvement in relief work, beginning with food distribution in Ireland during the Great Famine of the 1840s, and their aid to war victims during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71.²³ Quaker organisations provided relief during and after the First World War, especially in central and Eastern Europe. In the crisis years of 1920–22, and again in 1924, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) fed about a million German children a day. During the 1920s the Friends' Unit was the largest milk distributor in Vienna and throughout the decade Quaker relief teams were active in Serbia, Poland and Russia.²⁴ Quakers also responded to refugee crises, including those which accompanied the Spanish Civil War and the Fall of France.²⁵ These prior conflicts had given Quakers useful experience in the art of balancing their pacifist (or pacifistic) ideals, their commitment to social activism and the needs of military administration. One point to be stressed here is the sense of achievement which the Quakers felt in their record of such tasks. One article in *The Friend* even spoke of their 'considerable and rather embarrassing reputation for relief work'.²⁶

Some individual Quakers committed themselves to relief work at the beginning of the Second World War. The Friends had no established, official body ready to engage in overseas relief at this point but the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU)—initially organised during the First World War—was rapidly re-established in 1939. The FAU worked throughout the world during the war yet it

was an independent body and was not responsible to the Religious Society of Friends Yearly Meeting.²⁷ Moreover, some Quakers criticised the FAU's notion of 'alternative service' and its provision of ambulance work for the armed forces.²⁸

In 1942 a variety of Friends' committees began to plan for post-war relief operations in continental Europe. As a result, the Friends Relief Service Committee was established in spring 1943 and it represented official Quaker interests on COBSRA. This arrangement enabled the FRS to send relief teams into Europe, and ensured that it received material support for doing so: the Foreign Office reimbursed all COBSRA societies for 50 per cent of their expenditure and members of all British voluntary organisations shared the privileges of British army officers in terms of accommodation, transport and rations.²⁹ The FAU maintained its independent existence until the summer of 1946 when it was disbanded and about 40 of its members joined the FRS.³⁰

Numerically, the FRS was clearly overshadowed by UNRRA: the FRS only sent about twelve hundred relief workers to post-war Europe, in comparison with the twelve thousand serving in UNRRA.³¹ Yet the FRS was present at some vital moments. Quakers were among the first civilian relief workers to reach France after the Liberation: while the highly patriotic French resistance authorities were often hostile to foreign relief agencies, they made an exception for the Quakers;³² they worked in Holland after the hunger-winter of 1944–45; FRS 100 arrived at Belsen shortly after the liberation, and one of their team, Jane Levenson, was the first British Jewish relief worker to enter the camp;³³ FRS 124 was solely responsible for 24 different camps and communities in the British zone of Germany, amounting to a total of almost eight thousand people.³⁴ The work of the FRS and the AFSC was so significant that they were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.³⁵ Winston Churchill also recognised the value of the FRS, noting that 'everyone respects the Quakers'.³⁶ The Quakers themselves were aware of their rather unusual position as a small organisation with some real ability to meet challenges that might have baffled or overwhelmed larger and richer agencies. *The Friend* contributed a perceptive comment on this point, suggesting—once again—the distinctive nature of the Quaker ethic.

Who can judge of what changes in thought and outlook are made among undemonstrative men and women when the fact is grasped that we work not in the name of conquerors or military powers, but in the name of Christ, and that in our hearts there is no bitterness?³⁷

The key points here are the Quakers' dedication to a set of specific spiritual values, and their insistence that their record should not be judged in technocratic or managerial terms concerning the numbers of calories distributed per day per recipient, but as a type of liberating process.

Let us turn to the philosophy behind the work. Quakers believe that the 'light of Christ can illumine each individual soul', and in consequence cannot dismiss or demean anyone.³⁸ Their humanitarian intervention stemmed directly from their collective sense of spiritual 'concern', which is more than simply a sense of individual obligation. Roger Wilson explained this point in some detail:

The true 'concern' is a gift from God, a leading of his Spirit which may not be denied. Its sanction is not that on investigation it proves an intelligent thing to do—though it usually is; it is that the individual, and if his concern is shared and adopted by the Meeting, then the Meeting knows, as a matter of inward experience, that there is something which the Lord would have done, however obscure the way, however uncertain the means to human observation.³⁹

Arguably, this sense of serving 'under concern' stimulated the Quakers to develop more democratic and inclusive practices than UNRRA. Such concerns were manifest in different forms. The FAU was proud of the 'unit democracy' within its ranks.⁴⁰ But the Quakers also used democratic practices as a means to integrate those whom others rejected. In the FRS film, *While Germany Waits* (1945), FRS teams are seen aiding German civilians, displaced persons and expellees with equal care and attention. The voiceover explains that their aim in Germany is to promote understanding between all groups of people and to champion the idea that 'all men are equal...and rights of the individual are important under the Fatherhood of God'. This sentiment was extended to all, and in November 1945 McClelland noted with pride that the repatriation of a group of Poles had been carried out well because there were such good relations between so many different groups: 'Germans, Poles and English had shared in the job, as had conscientious objectors and soldiers'.⁴¹

IN THE COCKPIT OF EUROPE

Relief work in Germany meant being 'in the cockpit of Europe': many relief workers were excited about being part of the vanguard of a new Europe, possibly of a new world.⁴² The Quakers shared in this excitement but they did not want it to obscure their spiritual aims: 'our work is a mission', commented McNeill.⁴³ It was this spiritual commitment which led the Quakers to insist upon two conditions before they went to Germany: Quaker grey and fraternisation.

Since the seventeenth century, Quakers had committed themselves to the Peace Testimony, and this has resulted in modern Quakers being widely associated with pacifism.⁴⁴ However, a commitment to peace can be interpreted in a number of ways. Mendlesohn argues that the Peace Testimony 'is fundamentally a quietist testimony of non-involvement'.⁴⁵ Certainly the original Testimony was issued not to oppose warfare but to reassure King Charles II that the Quakers would not rise in revolt against him.⁴⁶ Yet the 'quietist' period of Quaker life ended with the campaigns against the slave trade, and throughout the nineteenth century Quakers became increasingly involved with humanitarian activities and Quakers were one of the first members of the Peace Society, an organisation founded on the belief that 'war is inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity and the true interests of mankind'.⁴⁷ By the twentieth century Quakers were accustomed to work for peace through social action. This took widely different forms. Some pacifists, realising the 'monstrous oppression' of the fascist regimes, decided that they would simply have to enter the armed forces. Sixteen per cent of male Quakers and 1.5 per cent of female Quakers served in the armed forces during the

war; while 35.5 per cent of male Quakers and 1.5 per cent of female Quakers were registered as conscientious objectors.⁴⁸ Many conscientious objectors accepted work in agriculture, food production and hospitals as an alternative to military service, yet the unprecedented brutality of the Nazi regime ensured that the war against Germany was a period of 'extraordinary difficulty' for many pacifists.⁴⁹ Eryl Hall Williams was a Presbyterian who had worked with the Welsh Council of the YMCA before joining FRS 100. He had been a committed conscientious objector throughout the war but on arriving at Belsen he felt 'guilt and shame' at having done nothing to bring about 'the collapse of the "evil empire."' ⁵⁰ Despite the ever-extending list of their service in relief work, evacuation assistance, air-raid shelters and ambulances, Quakers could feel defensive or uncomfortable about their opposition to war and could face public scorn.

Regardless of their attitude towards the role of military force in this particular war, Quakers were opposed to militarism *per se*. Consequently, they had to consider carefully their relations with the British army and the War Office. All British relief workers abroad had to wear military-style uniforms, but the War Office was slow to decide whether the FRS could retain their distinctive grey outfits, or whether they should wear the standard khaki issue. Friends worried that a military uniform would encourage people to associate them with military power, and that those wearing uniform might develop militaristic tendencies. In spring 1944 the Friends Yearly Meeting refused to accept khaki for its members, and the team which was to provide aid in the Balkans was cancelled.⁵¹ This may seem like a petty issue: what does a uniform matter if people are hungry and need help? For the Quakers, it was a point of principle. Roger Wilson commented:

If any reader thinks the issue a small one, let him reflect that to Friends their relief work is but one expression of a major concern for Christian action, and that dissociation from military action is a large part of their religious testimony.⁵²

Clothing had long been an important marker of Quaker identity. Seventeenth-century Quakers were ridiculed for their 'plain dress' yet insisted on retaining it as an outward symbol of inner commitment.⁵³ When the FRS eventually set off into Europe, they wore Quaker grey uniforms.

The non-fraternisation order was a second major point of dispute. Unlike France and the Low Countries, Germany had not been liberated but occupied, and Eisenhower's December 1944 directive forbade all unnecessary conversation between military personnel and German civilians.⁵⁴ Yet Friends simply would not accept the injunction to deny human relations to a whole group.⁵⁵ 'From what we have learnt of Jesus, we cannot deny the rights of God's sonship to any human being, nor fail to regard each one as of infinite worth', stated the annual Quaker epistle for 1945.⁵⁶ Elizabeth Bayley emphasised the contradictions in the non-fraternisation policy: among the Dutch—with whom she was allowed to talk—were many 'traitors' who had collaborated with the Nazis.⁵⁷ At first, the military authorities refused to allow FRS teams into Germany until they agreed to comply with the order, and the teams waited in the Netherlands while officials from Friends House negotiated. In the end, the matter was just dropped. When she was

in Germany, Bayley consciously went out ‘fratting’, and the military just accepted that the Friends would ‘shake hands with all and sundry’.⁵⁸ This point marks a vital difference with the practices of UNRRA, whose workers by and large accepted the ruling that DPs merited more assistance than Germans, and who concentrated their efforts on the former, with only occasional interest in the latter. Here, the Quakers speak with a striking near-unanimity: they were deeply concerned about the physical and spiritual condition of both Germans and DPs.

These points give a sense of how the Quakers approached issues of principle raised by DPs and the occupation of Germany. Their sense of mission, and their pride in their record of service, gave them the confidence to answer back to the Allied authorities; the fact that skilled relief workers were urgently needed strengthened their position, and allowed them to win some of these arguments.

‘ACT LIKE CONQUERORS’: RELIEF WORK IN GERMANY

In the 1930s Friends had lobbied for the admittance of the victims of Nazism as refugees into Britain; in the 1940s some of them learnt of the horrors of the concentration camps. ‘The facts were so terrible that the mere reading of reports made the heart sick and the brain reel. They were literally *incredible*.’⁵⁹ While acknowledging the humanity of Germans they would not ignore the crimes of the Nazi regime. One article in *The Friend* stated that ‘reconciliation does not mean covering up wounds or ignoring guilt’: a provocative and thoughtful phrase.⁶⁰ Such principles meant that FRS teams entered post-war Germany with a sense of ambivalence. Bayley expresses this well:

I can’t speak for everyone but M [Margaret McNeill] and I at least felt curiously muddled. We were rebels against the official non-fraternisation order, and yet our chief fear was that we would too easily forget what we had seen and heard in Holland and be ‘soft’ with the Germans who we had known as an attractive people with a beautiful countryside. We wanted to talk but, in order to ‘put them right about a thing or two’ as Bill Fraser once put it. My feeling is that it is nonsense to say there are not ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Germans. There are also probably 95% who, like people in every land are neither.⁶¹

On the actual entry into Germany, two events made Bayley and McNeill feel still more ‘curiously muddled’. At the Dutch–German frontier, the British army had erected two signboards. The first read, ‘You are now entering Germany. Here ends the civilised world’; the second, ‘You are now entering Germany. Behave like Conquerors’. Bayley thought the signs were ‘sickening’; McNeill went further: ‘I never thought the British Army would have descended to that—the Nazis alone I would have said capable of such grossly bad taste’.⁶² Things became worse after they crossed the border: some children greeted them with V for Victory signs and others with Nazi salutes.⁶³

In Germany, Bayley and McNeill found themselves confronted with a series of unexpected dilemmas. In many parts of Germany people remembered the Quakers arriving to distribute food in 1918 and FRS teams were therefore not seen as ‘conquerors’ or even as part of an occupying army. Yet this did not solve

the problems they encountered. Quakers recognised that Nazi practices had to be acknowledged and condemned: their qualification was that 'we cannot fasten labels of accusation upon whole peoples'.⁶⁴ Joel Welty (AFSC) responded testily to those who complained about Quaker friendliness to ex-Nazis arguing that 'perhaps Nazis needed our message more than anti-Nazis'.⁶⁵ However, the relationships with ex-Nazis were more complex than this position suggests. In conversation with FRS teams many Germans seemed unashamed about their Nazi past. McNeill recalled how German kitchen staff at the FRS house in Goslar reminisced about seeing Hitler on a 'Strength through Joy' cruise and described him as having beautiful hands.⁶⁶ Bayley was frustrated at what she saw as a widespread German refusal to recognise any responsibility for the misdeeds of the Nazis, even among those who apparently accepted the gravity of Nazi crimes. One German woman described how she had given all her ski equipment to the *Wehrmacht*: 'we were too obedient', she concluded.⁶⁷ 'But what else could they have done?' Bayley asked herself in her diary, and then went on to add, 'Indeed I don't know, and yet one feels any other people would have done something'.⁶⁸ Bayley worried not just about the German denial but about her own reactions and confessed that 'I run the risk of becoming quite violently anti-German sometimes'.⁶⁹

Principles which had seemed clear-cut in Britain seemed more awkward amidst the devastation of newly liberated Holland or occupied Germany. One such dilemma confronted FRS 124 as staff arrived at their billets at The Hague. The house was clean, in good order and thoroughly delightful. Team members could not believe their luck. They then learned that house was only in such an excellent condition because it had been cleaned by Nazi collaborators under armed guard. This 'spoils the first fine Quaker rapture'.⁷⁰ Other moral compromises continued: FRS teams had to requisition clothes, houses and all sorts of basic supplies from the German population. Sometimes this was done formally, through the local *Burgomeister*; at other times, team members simply became adept at 'picking things up', a practice which 'caused turmoil in the Quaker breast'.⁷¹

Questions of nationalism also had an impact upon all human relations. McNeill was unhappy with the widespread tendency of all around her to think in terms of 'nations' rather than 'mankind'.⁷² It was everywhere: DP camps were generally organised by national group, and relief workers spoke of them as 'the Letts' (the Latvians); 'the Ests' (the Estonians), 'the Liths' (the Lithuanians) and so on. McNeill herself referred to the Poles as 'a paradoxical people'; sometimes she declared they were 'like naughty children' and sometimes she idealised their 'wild romanticism'.⁷³ These national stereotypes were not simply imposed on the displaced persons: they defined themselves by their nationalities, demonstrating extremely patriotic feelings, even becoming—in McNeill's words—'violently nationalistic'.⁷⁴ Displaced persons re-asserted their national traditions as way of re-creating their own identities, and McNeill's diary is full of notes about Ukrainian history, the details of national celebrations in the Baltic republics and the religious practices of the White Ruthenians.

To develop good relations with displaced people it was important to understand, respect and celebrate these national identities. However, the FRS teams had to do this without supporting traditional national rivalries. At one stage the leader of FRS 124 had to admonish team members for supporting 'their own' displaced persons too exclusively: 'You *must* get out of this dreadful way of championing the nationalities against each other'.⁷⁵ But questions of national identity became all-consuming, and Bayley was already tired of them by July 1945. On a visit to a Lido in the Harz Mountains she was relieved that, for once, everyone looked similar: national identity could not be discerned from a bathing costume. 'A pity clothes can't be discarded perhaps', she wrote, 'all nationalities look much the same out of uniform'.⁷⁶

Predictably, the FRS found it difficult always to put their principles into practice. The record of Nazi war crimes and the Holocaust raised immense moral questions: while the Quakers discussed these with more clarity than many other British organisations, one is left with the impression that they too were stunned by the evidence revealed at the end of the Reich and were often over-wrought by the practical and emotional problems of organising relief.

ASSOCIATING WITH THE ARMY

As Roger Wilson made clear, one key FRS principle was a 'dissociation from military action'.⁷⁷ Unlike the more pragmatic FAU, FRS staff would only commit themselves to 'second-stage' relief work, namely work that takes place *after* military hostilities have ceased. Yet, in practice, they found it difficult not to associate with the military. One Quaker observer watched a German policeman stopping civilian traffic in order to wave through a British vehicle, and concluded that such banal, daily acts were 'a visible reminder to the visitor that he belongs to a colonial power'.⁷⁸ Freeman has suggested that Quakers actually shared a great many of the 'military values' of the period and were prepared to participate in the military state.⁷⁹ Nevertheless individual Quakers clearly felt that their own spiritual commitments set them apart from the armed services.

The FRS encountered the same dilemma that had previously confronted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC had been created as an international, humanitarian relief society with a commitment to strict neutrality, yet as national Red Cross societies developed they were all quickly integrated into their respective national war machines, a process described as the 'militarisation of humanitarianism'.⁸⁰ Bayley and McNeill certainly found the British Red Cross too militarised, and thought that their attachment to titles and uniforms and military rituals made them inefficient. On a more speculative note, Bayley worried that relief workers in militarised units, such as the Guides International Service, found a perverse pleasure in the disorder of war: 'The Guides, needless to say, were full of energy and enjoying themselves hugely. It's all right to endure, but I don't know why they seem to enjoy dirt and discomfort'.⁸¹

FRS members tried to construct a working relationship with the army without becoming integrated into it. The Quakers were—and are—anti-militaristic but they recognised the role that the military had played in defeating Nazism. Roger Wilson provided a striking and nuanced comment on this point.

Political peace negotiations with Hitler were morally, no less than diplomatically, impossible. Speaking personally as a Christian pacifist, I had a far deeper sense of spiritual unity with those of my friends in the fighting services, who, detesting war as deeply as I did, yet felt that there was no other way in which they could share in the agony of the world, than I had with those pacifists who talked as if the suffering of the world could be turned off like a water tap if only politicians would talk sensibly together.⁸²

On a more practical note, both McNeill and Bayley wrote frequently about encounters with the British army for it was responsible for providing relief teams with all equipment and supplies. Stoves, rations, washing soda, dustpans, disinfectant, scouring powder: they all came from the army. Sourcing supplies was difficult and time-consuming but McNeill believed that military personnel were doing their best to help. She continually notes that both officers and men were 'very decent', 'enormously kind', 'decent humane hard-working and above all nicely ordinary' and 'kindness itself'.⁸³ Bayley was less prone to such praise but counted 'Army, DPs and Germans' as all friends.⁸⁴ Social encounters between Quakers and the military were often successful too. Bayley and McNeill went to dinners at the officers' club and to parties with the other ranks, and army officers were routinely invited to the Friends' parties. Officers clearly enjoyed going to the Quakers' house, and took to 'dropping in' every night, prompting Bayley to grumble that the officers failed to realise that they had to work in the evenings: 'do officers ever write home?—they don't seem to know the meaning of an early night'.⁸⁵

Sometimes the Quakers' complaints were more serious. Both Bayley and McNeill thought that British officers drank far too much and that 'the British army is fast drugging whatever intelligence it had with liquor'.⁸⁶ According to McClelland, while German civilians and displaced people were cold and hungry, British officers were wantonly wasting electricity and petrol, and they kept expensive horses when there was little fodder to keep farm horses alive.⁸⁷ The FRS team also resented the way they often had to move themselves or the displaced persons at very short notice. When they were working in The Hague they were given less than 24 hours notice to move into Germany; once they were in Germany, there was nowhere to stay and no-one was expecting them.⁸⁸ However, their most serious criticism was that much of the army just did not care for the welfare of displaced peoples. Some British soldiers were often quite explicit: they simply preferred Germans to DPs.⁸⁹ Officers were occasionally compassionate but mainly saw displaced persons as an administrative problem, not a human one. Paradoxically the army felt more threatened by displaced people than the Quakers because soldiers were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to create a

human connection with them. 'How often have I been warned by officers not to believe what Poles or Italians tell me', complained Bayley. The army had offered them soldier-escorts, insisting that displaced people would not take orders from women. The offer was refused and Bayley insisted that 'when you treat the Vienenburg Poles as reasonable people, and as friends, they behave as such'.⁹⁰

FRS teams worked well with military personnel but it often proved easier for the women to forge good relations with army officers than it did for the men. Soldiers often saw the typical Quaker man as a 'spineless inefficient conchie' but held no such disdain for the Quaker women who occupied a less controversial position.⁹¹ Army officers even felt protective towards female team members, a number of whom were still in their twenties, and they clearly enjoyed their company. In Heiningen, the FRS team initially shared billets with officers from the King's Regiment whom McNeill described as 'very dashing and sophisticated but kind'.⁹² The officers were then replaced with the Pioneers, 'who are duller but really more our cup of tea and a good thing too as our own men get on with them and have ceased to sit in sulky silence while the British Army rubbed up its gallantry'.⁹³ One gets the impression of handsome young officers paying attention to the Quaker women while the Quaker men sat morosely on the sidelines: not a situation conducive to good morale.

Bayley and McNeill were acutely aware that, despite being Quakers, they were benefitting from being associated with the army. In Bayley's words, 'We, being in uniform have the best of both worlds for though officially civilians over here we count for all practical purposes as military'.⁹⁴ Roger Wilson also reflected on this situation, and while recognising that they had to accept 'the basic arrangements of conquerors', he worried about the repercussions of being well-fed in a country where most people were hungry, and of being warm in a country where most people were cold.⁹⁵ Such privileges could engender corruption and Wilson confessed he had broken a traffic regulation when driving a military car, something he would not have contemplated in a civilian vehicle.⁹⁶ Other examples of military influence on the FRS can be cited. Yvonne Marrack, the leader of FRS 124 was obviously irked by one of the other FRS leaders who, allegedly, was a 'masculine, very aggressive, determined, confident, commanding woman, already wearing a little bit of grey braid on her shoulder to distinguish her from the rest of the team, and apparently on the heartiest of terms with her Major'.⁹⁷ Not only had she adopted a very military manner but all of the team lived in a 'very superior flat and messed with the officers'.⁹⁸ Those who had so fiercely opposed the Quakers donning military uniform obviously had a point as Quakers were not immune to aping military manners. The FRS had set itself a hard task: even their dedicated, trained staff could be impressed by the prestige and power represented by military authorities. The FRS depended on these authorities for so much of their work, and it was often hard for them to maintain a separate ethic and calling.

BETWEEN THE ARMY AND UNRRA:
TOWARDS A QUAKER ETHIC OF RELIEF WORK

In *While Germany Waits* displaced persons are described as 'liberated but not free...condemned to live a life of inactivity and boredom' and it concludes that every effort to promote friendship and understanding must be made to help them feel as at home as possible until their problems are solved. This sentiment was shared by the Quaker relief workers: for them the primary way in which they demonstrated Quaker concern was to concentrate on forging personal relationships with displaced persons. They were responsible for providing practical relief—debugging camps, spraying people with DDT, organising clothing distributions, setting up feeding centres and providing basic medical services—yet the FRS attached more importance to their conversations with displaced people than to the provision of services. *The Friend* noted that 'It is so much easier to give a bowl of soup and an aspirin tablet than it is to straighten out a crooked mind and cleanse an impure heart—and such a temptation'.⁹⁹ Both McNeill's and Bayley's diaries are full of personal anecdotes about displaced persons, their life-histories, and records of conversations with them. Reflecting on her work, McNeill commented that 'we did seem to spend an inordinate amount of time just talking with the DPs'.¹⁰⁰

We have already noted the FRS's dislike of the military tendency to see DPs as a purely administrative problem. The FRS also criticised UNRRA teams for maintaining too much of a professional distance between themselves and the displaced persons. Yet these distancing techniques may not have been the result of cold-heartedness. Displaced people had often gone through such traumatic experiences that it was difficult to engage with them. Francesca Wilson, on first encountering camp inmates, confessed that 'at first it was hard to look on them without repulsion...these people were the victims of more than famine, they were the victims of cruelty'.¹⁰¹ Even FRS teams were often horrified by the filthy, degraded bodies they encountered. Bayley described camp inmates being taken to a de-lousing station in August 1945:

they went through to the showers where we, equipped with liquid soap and towels and dressed in khaki overalls and turbans, washed them or saw they did it themselves. Meanwhile others took their clothes and sprayed them with DDT. Meg and I did this last job one whole afternoon when some particularly dirty men were being bathed, and ugh you should have seen our faces expressing revolted disgust—it was really very comic—we hoped the Poles, who would keep clustering round the doorway to watch, couldn't see us.¹⁰²

Training in Britain had clearly not fully prepared them for the sights they confronted in the camps. Bayley gives us a glimpse into the distance between her home-life and the world of DP relief work. After a group of Italian inmates set off for home in August 1945, Bayley and Tim Evens, a fellow relief worker, went to inspect the camp they had left: 'I regret to say in the most revoltingly dirty state: I don't think I've ever seen anything so sordid—Mother would faint on the spot'.¹⁰³

Initially Bayley and McNeill responded to most difficulties with good humour. By 1947, after Bayley had left to get married, McNeill found it harder to laugh her way through problems. To make matters worse, it was becoming clear that it was sometimes very difficult to make friends with displaced people. McNeill recounts how on one 'ghastly day' she returned to the Quaker house to find 'four hungry Estonian women', an 'abominable little Frenchman' and 'a drunk creature called Ryle who announced he was staying for 3 weeks'. This was during a period in which she was finding it increasingly difficult to cope and she remarked somewhat acidly that she 'suddenly saw value of UNRRA screening'.¹⁰⁴ It was simply easier for Germans to appear as attractive, ordinary people: a perception that fed into the emerging Cold War structures in which the USSR, rather than Germany, was the primary political opponent. McNeill pasted this piece of doggerel from the *New Statesman* into her scrapbook to illustrate changing British attitudes:

British Zone

Our Jerry isn't a bad old stick,
 He's helping to clear the mess;
 But the refugee's not a bit of use,
 He'd leave the Hun to stew in his juice,
 He shirks the job with no excuse
 And he couldn't co-operate less, old boy,
 He couldn't co-operate less.¹⁰⁵

Of course many displaced persons did 'shirk the job' because they had been sent to Germany against their will in the first place.¹⁰⁶ More commonly, they refused to co-operate when they were asked to do something they disliked. McNeill's and Bayley's journals detail long arguments about issues such as communal feeding and the distribution of Red Cross parcels. At one point FRS 124 established a social club to promote cultural activities among the DPs but the venture quickly collapsed amidst much wrangling and acrimony. FRS members were eventually forced to acknowledge that the club had failed because they had tried to impose something on the displaced people without establishing whether they wanted it or not.¹⁰⁷ This Quaker attempt to respect autonomy was the one which best exemplifies what many saw as the 'qualitative difference' between UNRRA and FRS camps.¹⁰⁸

Quakers also expressed their own sense of identity by constructing an image of themselves as the enthusiastic amateurs of the relief world. As far as Francesca Wilson was concerned there was no contradiction between professionalisation and the humanitarian impulse. On the contrary, she was initially pleased that the professionalisation of social work had excluded the 'Lady Bountifuls'.¹⁰⁹ At the same time she thought that the best of the charitable spirit had endured, and she refers to 'Mother UNRRA', without whom the displaced would simply starve.¹¹⁰ UNRRA teams were staffed with nurses, welfare workers and dieticians, in stark contrast, FRS projects sometimes seemed like 'amateurish but well-meant efforts'.¹¹¹ The FRS officer in charge of food distribution had received only minimal training 15 years earlier when 'calories had not yet become the rage'.¹¹²

She was not alone in her lack of professional training, and McNeill acknowledged that 'Relief work undoubtedly engenders a readiness to attempt tasks for which one has few or none of the requisite qualifications'.¹¹³ FRS workers took great pride not in 'qualifications' but in their common sense and practical experience, and McNeill archly records that 'our methods had not evolved from theory but from six months' hard work in the field'.¹¹⁴

The Quakers were vocal about the overriding importance of emotional warmth and the relative under-importance of technical knowledge. Yet at some points they clearly exaggerated their case by under-stating their own training. FRS workers were not well-meaning amateurs. They had all undergone a rigorous selection process, from which only one in ten were accepted.¹¹⁵ This was followed by intense training courses, such as those held at Mount Waltham house in London. Roger Wilson had made it plain that 'The good-hearted amateur can be very ineffective if he or she is no more than that'.¹¹⁶ Most significantly, the Friends were insistent upon relief workers having the right language skills and FRS members were scathing about the lack of German speakers in UNRRA teams.¹¹⁷ McNeill described a visit from the UNRRA Area Nursing Advisor. Miss P., 'a very earnest young woman' was armed with all the latest scientific advice concerning nursery routines, four-hourly feeding and the regular distribution of cod-liver oil. She was so focussed on this aspect of her work that she failed to notice the 'happy and picturesque babies and toddlers' and, in any case, was unable to speak to the mothers because she knew no German.¹¹⁸ McNeill's criticisms are telling here. She perceived the UNRRA officer as both overly-technical and under-skilled. Even more telling is the enjoyment that both Bayley and McNeill found in mocking Miss P.'s efforts.

[Miss P.] pounced on the one large placid Ukrainian woman with an infant in her arms and asked through Liz (for of course Miss P. couldn't speak a word of German) whether the baby was getting 4 or 5 hourly feeds. The woman said yes to everything but for the sake of peace Liz let Miss P. think '4 hourly' was part of the 'nursery routine' and everyone smiled and was happy when unfortunately the baby started to whimper. Still smiling, the mother immediately clapped it to her breast. Miss P. looked pointedly at her gold watch which pointed to 22 minutes past 3—it hardly seemed likely the last meal had been at 22 minutes past 11!!! All poor Liz could say at the end of the day was well the fact remains that the babies don't die.

This deliberately constructed comic scene contains a clear indictment of UNRRA: 'of course' Miss P. did not speak German and she was wearing a gold watch to visit displaced people. We cannot make generalisations about UNRRA from these comments but they do tell us a great deal about FRS values, namely that both Bayley and McNeill wanted to be seen as on the side of the DPs rather than the side of UNRRA. There is also some indication of a reversal of power relations in this scene. The 'very earnest' Miss P. could not control the breast-feeding habits of the DP mothers and 'the humane, anonymous, quietly efficient Quaker workers' did not want to help her. Quakers did not habitually obstruct UNRRA practices, yet FRS members clearly enjoyed emphasising the differences between them.

CONCLUSION

The emotions of relief work are elusive and when FRS 124 was finally disbanded in 1948, McNeill paused to think about how its records might be interpreted by future historians.

let the historians browse in the dog-eared files, let the statisticians loose on the uncompleted Unnra forms and let all team members gather together in the ghost for one last dream-like meeting round the dining room table... But who could attempt to pin down on paper the gabble of conversation that arises with an obligato of telephone, Hedwig's shrill prattle and the clatter of the enamel plates...¹¹⁹

Her semi-humorous comments make a significant point: there are important elements of relief work which remain unquantifiable, and the vast array of poorly co-ordinated, overlapping agencies at work in post-war Germany presents historians with a particularly difficult task. For this reason, FRS relief work often simply reflected the chaos of the time and place: the word 'muddle' appears often in Bayley's journal. Nonetheless, some clear points emerge from the evidence analysed in this paper. The first is that there can be no doubt that a distinctive ethos of Quaker relief work inspired the Quaker-led teams who went out to Germany. This ethic was discussed by experienced Quaker commentators (such as Francesca Wilson and Roger Wilson), and was expressed and debated in the columns of *The Friend*, and clearly affected the day-to-day practice of the FRS teams. Long before our current commitment to truth and reconciliation processes, the Quaker ethic stressed the importance of inclusivity, equality, openness, responsibility and acceptance. The emotional reactions of individual relief workers also indicated how slow and difficult this process could be yet it seems reasonable to conclude that this ethic gave their teams a particularly strong collective identity, and this coherent worldview may well have protected their workers from psychological trauma, corruption and demoralisation.¹²⁰

The history of the FRS also highlights the key challenges of faith-based humanitarian agencies, namely how to focus on the spirit of the work while acknowledging the importance of material needs and working within the political and financial restraints of the relevant authorities. The differences between the Quaker teams and the other relief teams should not be exaggerated: UNRRA also attracted some passionately idealistic agents;¹²¹ and UNRRA teams could function as real ethical collectives which sustained their members during an intensely demanding period.¹²² However, UNRRA was a new organisation, which was attempting to change very quickly to meet several unexpected crises; its members simply did not benefit from the collective moral and practical inheritance which sustained the Quakers.

A second, historiographical, point relates to the value of the Quakers as witnesses to the DP crisis in post-war Germany. Arguably, they were in a unique position: they were 'in UNRRA but not of it'. Their ethic, experience and sense of identity gave them a distinctive critical perspective on the newer organisation; when this was coupled with the Quaker tradition of self-interrogation, it enabled

Quaker relief workers to write some of the most revealing and informative memoirs from this episode.

There remains, however, a third point on which it is harder to reach a conclusion. In practice, were Quakers 'better' relief workers than those in the UNRRA teams? One immediate problem here concerns how one would define a 'good' relief team. In the last analysis, was the most important task that of getting the most calories to the largest number of unhealthy people? Did the Quakers' ideals genuinely and positively affect the DPs they met? To answer these important questions, more comparative research needs to be carried out, moving away from the standard historiographical focus on relief work as a form of social policy in practice, and attempting to consider such issues from the point of view of the recipients.

NOTES

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10. For a history of relief work policy in this period see the special issue of *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008).

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17. Marrus, *Unwanted*, p. 299; Wyman, M., *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 17; Shephard, B., *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War*, London: Bodley Head, 2010, p. 59. A prominent and memorable description of one such epic journey is Primo Levi's *The Truce*, England: Abacus, 1996.
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28. Wilson, *Authority*, p. 10. See also Barnard, C., *Binding the Wounds of War: A Young Relief Worker's Letters Home, 1943–47*, London: Pronoun Press, 2010, p. 18.
29. Wilson, *Quaker Relief*, p. 224.
30. Wilson, *Quaker Relief*, p. 240. See also Cadbury, P., 'The End of An Experiment: FAU, 1939–1946', *The Friend*, 28 June 1946, pp. 521–22.
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