

THE QUAKER PEACE TESTIMONY IN  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY EDUCATION\*

John Lampen  
Stourbridge, England

ABSTRACT

To see Quaker values in action in British education, we must look not to the recognised Quaker Schools but to the 'planned environmental therapy' movement which Friends and others developed to meet the needs of difficult evacuated children in the 1939-45 War. Their practice recognised each child's innate worth and capacity for good by creating systems of governance and discipline which embodied Quaker testimonies to peace and equality. They made a lasting impact on the care of difficult and damaged children. This article argues that this forgotten work is one of the great Quaker contributions to education in the last 200 years.

KEYWORDS

Quaker education, maladjusted children, planned environmental therapy, David Wills.

In his 1979 Swarthmore Lecture *Of Schools and Schoolmasters*, John Reader looked back over his long experience of Friends' schools as pupil, teacher and head. Recognising that Friends had never developed 'a coherent philosophy of education', he asked what (if anything) their contribution ought to be in future. He answered in two words, community and compassion.<sup>1</sup> He relates 'community' to the way that the Quaker business method seeks to get a general agreement to each decision; 'compassion' is connected to Friends' faith in 'that of God' in each person. The two together help to integrate a school's discipline system with the Quaker peace testimony. It is disappointing that he does not refer directly to a long-standing movement in which Quakers were centrally involved to put these ideals into practice in schools.

In 1935 there was a call in *The Friend* from David Wills for a new approach to the treatment of problem children. This came to the attention of Dr Marjorie Franklin<sup>2</sup>, who had already brought together a small group called the Q Camps Committee ('Q' for Query or Quest) with the same objective, though they planned to work with young men of 17 to 23, not children. Writing to David,

she described herself: 'Although not a Friend I have always been in contact with them. I was for a short time with the Friends War Victims' relief party in France. My brother, Geoffrey Franklin, who died in 1930, was with them throughout the war and had previously been a student at Woodbrooke.'

David had originally worked at a Farm Training colony in 1922. He was then nineteen, unskilled and scared:

I began by saying that I would report any boy who broke the rule forbidding the wearing of boots in the dormitory. Fifteen boys were fined the routine twopence from their few coppers pocket money. The pasteboard slips that appeared in their pay envelopes explaining the absence of 2d. I found stuck on my cubicle door. These I collected with care, and duly returned each to its owner. The procedure was to say politely, 'Yours, I believe?' and as the victim took the card from my right hand I delivered a vicious blow to the side of his head with my left...<sup>3</sup>

He left this hateful milieu and won a Willard Straight Fellowship to the New York School of Social Work where he trained as a psychiatric social worker (the first Briton to do so), and then worked in The Children's Village in New York State. Returning to Britain he took up the post of warden of the Oxford Settlement in Risca in Wales, one of the Educational Settlements set up by the Friends Coalfield Distress Committee. It was at this point that he joined the Society of Friends.

David later described himself in *The Barns Experiment*:

I have most of the commonly recognised disqualifications for dealing with young people, or, for that matter, with any people. I am reserved in manner and not very approachable, and I find it very difficult to make contact with other people, especially with children. I find that in talking to them I am inclined to be either fatuously facetious or ponderously pompous—I can hardly ever talk to them casually and naturally. I am quick-tempered and...I have that worst possible of vices—I am addicted to sarcasm... I have my good points too, of course—this is not a masochistic orgy. But if you add to this formidable list of failings all the virtues you can possibly think of, have you then the picture of a man ideally suited to working with difficult children? You have not.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless in 1936 he accepted an offer from the Q Camps Committee to become Camp Chief at Hawkspur Camp. He served briefly as a Borstal Officer specifically to gain some experience before going there. The Camp served as a tough testing-ground for his ideas, but the onset of war and the lack of official support and recognition brought it to an end in 1940. Wartime brought an increased need for therapeutic education as there were a considerable number of children who were reacting badly to separation (by bereavement or evacuation) from their families. Friends were concerned about the traumatic wartime experiences of such children. They were able to set up institutions and liberate gifted and visionary people, who were not all Quakers though usually conscientious objectors, to run them. Such schools were not always specifically therapeutic establishments, for example Kenneth Barnes' private school at Wennington. Friends saw this as a way to express their peace testimony and relieve the suffering

caused by war. The war united the nation as a society; but spiritual values, independent critical thinking, nonviolent conflict resolution and preparing young people for a peaceful future were not likely to be nurtured. The Quaker network across the country and the availability of Quaker money helped in this task.

For example, a group of Friends founded an evacuation hostel at Chaigeley Manor in Lancashire, and appointed as warden Edward Seel, who had been educated in Quaker schools, and his wife Margaret. The hostel became a school in 1942 because many of the children proved too disturbed for the village school to cope with. Friends Relief Service bore the costs until 1944 when it was recognised by the Board of Education as a school for maladjusted children and an independent board with Quaker representatives was set up. About that time it moved to Cheshire, where it still operates. Dunmow Hall School (now Breckenborough School), which was founded in 1935, also owes its survival and much of its philosophy to its work with evacuated children and the support of Yorkshire Quakers, who are still represented on its board.

In 1940 David Wills accepted a post with Peebleshire County Council as Warden of the Barns Evacuation Hostel for disturbed and unbilletable evacuee children. Again the management committee was composed mainly of Quakers who believed in him, and the Friends War Victims Relief Committee took an interest. It was here that David forged his methods and crystallised his philosophy, which later came to be called 'planned environmental therapy'. This was based on the belief that psychological healing did not have to come through special techniques of talk or play; it could happen in a setting where every part of life was designed to assist the healing process. The foundations were community and active compassion. Planned environmental therapy had four major elements:

1. *A regime based on love*: This was the most Quakerly component. David quotes 1 John 4:20, 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' But he comments, 'We may not be able to see God, but neither can we smell him, and we can smell our brother. He stinks, because he soils his pants. What is more, his nose runs, he stuffs food into his mouth with the filthy fingers with which he has just wiped it, he kicks us in the shins and repays any kindness with abuse. How can one love such a creature? It is quite simple if the will is there; not easy—simple.'<sup>5</sup>

2. *Shared responsibility between children and staff* for the school community and its life: This component came from Homer Lane, whose work in the United States and the Little Commonwealth, founded in Dorset in 1913, pioneered the idea of self-government by young people.<sup>6</sup> Its structure had economic, legislative, judicial and political features. In a lecture given in 1918, Lane said:

All those who are fourteen years or over are citizens having joint responsibility for the regulation of their lives by the laws and judicial machinery organised and developed by themselves. The adult element studiously avoid any assumption of authority in the community except in connection with their respective departmental duties as teachers or as supervisors of labour within the economic scheme.<sup>7</sup>

Lane was later described by David as a 'simple, perplexing, humble, vain, wise, foolish, tarnished, innocent, happy and tragic man'.<sup>8</sup> The Commonwealth closed in 1918, following allegations against Lane by two of the girls, but its influence was long-lasting. Though its immediate origins were not Quaker, I will show how this element was reinforced by Quaker values in governance and meeting for business.

3. An understanding of the children illuminated by *psychoanalytical thought*: The most direct influence was that of Marjorie Franklin, but the belief that this was an important component of the treatment of 'wayward youth' goes back to August Aichhorn, a friend and disciple of Sigmund and Anna Freud.<sup>9</sup> All the British pioneers were profoundly influenced by this. David wrote that the children in his care 'must be loved in order that they may learn how to love. That is not only Christian teaching; it is sound modern psychology.'<sup>10</sup>

4. *Avoidance of punishment*: David's fundamental position on this was that it was in his view unChristian; but 'as even Christians do not agree on this point' he sets out five practical reasons for it in *The Barns Experiment*:

- (i) It establishes a base motive for conduct.
- (ii) It has been tried and failed; or alternatively it has been so mis-used in the past as to destroy its usefulness now.
- (iii) It militates against the establishment of the relationship which we consider necessary between staff and children—a relationship within which the child must feel himself to be loved.
- (iv) Many delinquent children (and adults) are seeking punishment as a way of assuaging their guilt feelings.
- (v) When the offender has 'paid for' his crime, he can 'buy' another with an easy conscience.<sup>11</sup>

In its place he created a system of restitution for wrong-doing. This was offered, discussed and accepted between those involved in an incident; it was generally witnessed by the daily meeting of all the children and staff, though he experimented (and allowed the children to experiment) with different structures during his long career. It was a way to implement 'shared responsibility' because he believed that discipline and justice were too important a part of community life for the children to be excluded from these decisions (a very Quakerly insight). He did not much favour the creation of a formal Court system, linked to a token economy, which Lane had used. The practice of restitution, today often called 'restorative justice', was a common feature of the other new schools for difficult young people which developed at the time and later.<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Barnes experimented with it at Wennington.

I can illustrate how this works in practice from my own experience at one such school, Shotton Hall.

In the daily meeting Peter complained that he had received a kick and a sharp push from Jim as he was going downstairs; he added he had done nothing to provoke this. The boy in charge of the meeting (a responsibility which rotated day by day) asked Jim if it were true. Jim admitted it but tried to minimise it. Several other

witnesses disagreed, saying that Peter might well have fallen down the stairs. The chairman asked Jim if he was willing to make amends in some way. He replied, 'What would he like me to do?' Peter said nothing; he may have worried that Jim would react badly if he suggested something. Another boy said, 'Jim's name is coming up too often in these meetings. He should do something serious, like taking Peter to a film in town on Saturday.' The chairman asked Jim, 'Would you be willing to do that?' Jim said, 'I've got no money'. A teacher said he was planning to clear out a storeroom that afternoon and would pay Jim if he was willing to help him. Jim, who rather liked this teacher agreed; and in their time together the teacher was able to ask why he kept getting into trouble attacking other boys, and whether he wanted to stop. Both boys enjoyed the film and came back from town much better friends.

The idea that if one does wrong it is one's responsibility to put the matter right, out of justice to the person wronged and also to relieve one's own guilty feelings and regain the respect of the community, has an obvious relationship to Quaker thinking.<sup>13</sup> In his lecture, John Reader discussed traditional attitudes to punishment in Quaker schools, wondering how far they were consonant with the Quaker peace testimony; he cites there the ideas of a Friend (probably David) about restorative justice as a novelty which might be tried.<sup>14</sup> David believed strongly that the Society of Friends should develop a testimony against punishment, a view which he and other Friends advocated in their booklet *Six Quakers Look at Crime and Punishment*.<sup>15</sup>

David had an enormous influence on the therapeutic community schools through his very readable books and the Association of Workers with Maladjusted Children, which he helped to found in 1952, with its *Journal*. But in the public mind the approach was often confused with the complete *laissez-faire* which the well-known A.S. Neill offered the children at his school, Summerhill. This hindered its wider acceptance. David said, 'I am proud to count Neill as my friend, but angry when it is assumed that I share that attitude'.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, in *The Underwood Report*<sup>17</sup> the values advocated by the Association permeated into government thinking about institutions for disturbed children and gradually spread into the wider field of residential child care.

At Chaigeley the Seels were in regular contact with David and adopted many of his methods. Towards the end of their tenure, Howard Jones researched the methods and successes of the school.<sup>18</sup> His findings emphasise the crucial importance of the school community as an instrument of therapy and learning:

The group, whether it is the general meeting, watch committee, court or psychodrama session, becomes not merely the basic means of government and organisation but, under the control of insightful adults, the basic means of treatment. The apparently endless inter-analysis of personal and social problems, the 'transference' of attitude to the institutions, the group and the individual, the inevitable 'abreaction', constitute the basis for a living therapy which, if Jones' conclusions are valid, is particularly appropriate...for maladjusted children with their powerful urge to 'belong' and feel accepted by others...<sup>19</sup>

David Wills' prominence was well-deserved; but there were other Quaker school heads working in a similar way, such as Lisa and Alfred Gobell at Hengrove School, and later John Cross at New Barns and myself at Shotton Hall. I have not given space to Kenneth Barnes' work at Wennington because we have his own lively account.<sup>20</sup> (Of course there were also pioneering non-Quaker heads with similar philosophies, including my own first employer Fred Lennhoff at Shotton Hall.<sup>21</sup>) One important later experiment was the Friends Therapeutic Community, founded near Cambridge in 1969, which came to focus on the rehabilitation of young men who had been sexually abused and were now at risk of becoming abusers.

Planned environmental therapy developed intuitively, and the pioneers were more interested in experiment and discovery than in theorising about it (which is perhaps analogous to Quaker attitudes to theology). Yet it proved essential to adopt a coherent professional approach, without which the first Quaker-led experiment in this field, Sysonby (1914), collapsed.<sup>22</sup> The interaction of professionals in an experimental field with lay managing committees can sometimes be difficult. In my own experience as headmaster, there were times when I was extremely dependent on and thankful for the support and faith of the school's committee and its chairperson. There were other times when I was very frustrated at their insistence on intervening in situations of which they had no direct experience. My ambivalence will be familiar to anyone who has led a pioneering and difficult venture under the auspices of a committee.

So what difference did it make when the committee had a large Quaker element? There were both advantages and problems. David Wills described the nature of his relationship to the Quaker management at Barns:

Technically, I am their employee, doing a piece of work on their behalf; in practice our relationship, perhaps to the outsider a curious one, but common enough in the Society of Friends is that of a Committee 'liberating' a man to do a piece of work for which he is 'under concern'. Their support and encouragement have been constant and unflinching.<sup>23</sup>

(In contrast, he resigned from his last school Bodenham Manor because of difficulties with a non-Quaker committee.) Among the Quaker positives there is the tendency to trust, to hope, to encourage, to look for and believe in the good in people—in the head, the staff and the children. On the other hand there can be a negative Quaker silence, a reluctance to grasp the nettle when conflict is imminent. Friends do not always apply those principles of good conflict handling which our Society has done so much to develop.<sup>24</sup> This was seen at times in the life of Friends Therapeutic Community. A lot was at stake in an institution whose very name emphasised the Quaker connection:

Perhaps the most significant conflict between the first Warden and the Managing Committee and Trustees was, unfortunately, around the very question of how to handle conflict. Many Trustees and members of the Managing Committee were appalled by the destruction caused by some of the residents to the property when they were 'acting out', and lack of authority shown by the Warden was perceived as the problem. Had the Trustees and Management Committee been more widely

informed on the topic of therapeutic environments for children and young people, and aware of the high levels of destruction and disorder which had been tolerated in the past, and to a larger extent contained and managed in some therapeutic environments, such as the periods of physical destruction at Chaigeley and Hawkspur, they would perhaps not have been so alarmed. They would also have been better able to support the Warden, and to clarify their viewpoints on therapeutic community methods, if they had also been aware of how those other therapeutic environments had considered conflict and disorder as potentially therapeutic situations, giving the children and young people an opportunity to recognise the effects of disorder and destruction and resolve them for themselves, or to resolve difficulties they had in responding to traumatic events in the past.<sup>25</sup>

There were recurring conflicts between staff, successive wardens and management in the 1970s and 1980s. Eventually the Quaker committee members decided to apply the same methods of handling disagreement, conflict and decision making that had evolved in the therapeutic community movement and were in daily use in the life of the community; they began to see that these could also be a resource for managing and resolving their conflicts with the head and staff. This could only happen because these methods are profoundly compatible with Quaker principles. They are one way to express the practice of the Quaker meeting for business, though this may not be obvious at first; for instance, as David Wills observed, 'Shared responsibility [in a school] satisfies the need that all children have to feel that their side of the question is being heard'.<sup>26</sup> Elaine Boyling has written in an article on Quaker involvement in residential therapy:

Quaker business endeavours were undertaken with the aim of revealing God's work, mediated through the inner light, in the world. This attitude of having well-established criteria for considering business meant that the Quaker attitude to organising resources was successful because it was able to include not only material resources, but also an understanding of personal and spiritual resources, such as trust... These types of Quaker attitudes have been highly compatible with therapeutic environment methods that can recognise a diverse range of resources, including 'not-saying', silence, and listening. The practicality and 'reality confrontation' of Quakers and therapeutic environments also explains why they often take a work therapy approach to resolving some of the problems of delinquent young people, or other people who have become socially disenfranchised in some way.

A passage from Kenneth Barnes clarifies this, explaining why formal religion occupied a small place in his work with young people:

The growth in the school of a religious consciousness, then, is a growth in emotional maturity, in perception and discrimination, learnt through daily experiences. It is a growth in love, of people and of the world, in the power to direct action away from dead ends, away from what is unrewarding and inhuman, to what will open up life as 'a vast bundle of opportunities'. It is also a growth in awareness of the reality of evil, overt or latent in all communities, a recognition that we are all corruptible... All this can be evident, in miniature, in the crises of school life.<sup>27</sup>

Leila Rendel was the charismatic head of one of the first institutions, the Caldecott Community founded in 1911. She became a Quaker; and I have heard

but not been able to verify that she joined the Society of Friends because she found it the only Christian church whose values were consonant with what she had learnt through her work. They begin with the acceptance of 'that of God in everyone', so that no one is rejected as being beyond help. The belief in human equality leads to forms of governance in which everyone can have a say. Another shared value is the insistence that truth is seen in people's actions, not their words. David wrote, 'It seems presumptuous and very far from humble in us to claim that what we are trying to do is to show forth God not only with our lips but in our lives; and He knows how miserably we fail. But that *is* what we have got to try to do, just because it has so rarely been done in the case of the children in our care.'<sup>28</sup>

One of the results was to educate the pupils in practising peace. The school meetings and children's courts developed principles of conflict resolution which were needed to handle 'the crises of school life'. I was working at Shotton Hall, which had no Quaker tradition, when I first encountered Quakers. I found nothing strange about the peace testimony because it taught the same principles which I was already trying to practise every day.

I have explained that this movement was not exclusively Quaker. But Friends had an important influence in founding, financing, managing or supporting a large number of schools and hostels (more than I have had space to mention) to which they brought Quaker values. Elaine Boyling comments:<sup>29</sup>

The huge variety of beliefs and cultures that have contributed to therapeutic environments, and their capacity to include and tolerate such a wide range of people and attitudes, makes it more or less irrelevant, in practice, to say that any particular method is 'Quaker'. Many of the attitudes shown by Quakers in therapeutic environments can easily be translated into the language of any of the other faiths and belief systems that have inspired people living and working in therapeutic environments. However, the significance of Quakerism as a motivation and resource for groups and individuals can illuminate understanding of the organisation and attitudes in some therapeutic environments.

I believe planned environmental therapy can claim to be one of the two great Quaker contributions to education not only in the twentieth century but altogether. (In saying this I do not intend to devalue the many non-Quaker contributions to its development.) The second is the practical methodology of peace education in schools which was developed in the USA and first taken up in the country by the Kingston Friends Workshop Group.<sup>30</sup> That story deserves an article of its own. It is sad that Friends know so little about both these approaches, so closely linked in their philosophy, and sometimes undervalue them.<sup>31</sup> A Friend noted for her peace campaigning once said, 'There are things that need our attention a good deal more than teaching children not to bash each other in the playground!' But I give more credence to a conversation with Giandomenico Pico, the UN Assistant General Secretary who brought the Iran-Iraq War to an end and (at considerable personal risk) negotiated the liberation of the hostages in Lebanon. He told me, 'In the world as it is today, I can think of nothing more important than teaching the skills of peace to children'.



## NOTES

\* This article is taken from a forthcoming e-book, *A Letter from James: Essays in Quaker History*, by John Lampen, which can be downloaded to Kindle, iPads and computers free of charge. Details from [www.hopeproject.co.uk](http://www.hopeproject.co.uk).

1. John Reader, *Of Schools and Schoolmasters*, London: Quaker Home Service, 1979, § VII.
2. David Wills, 'An Appreciation of Marjorie E. Franklin', *Studies in Environment Therapy* 1 (1968), pp. 5-6.
3. David Wills, *Throw Away thy Rod*, London: Gollancz, 1960, p. 18. A similar description of the same establishment is given by the Quaker Gandhian Reginald Reynolds in *My Life and Crimes*, London: Jarrolds, 1956, Chapter 6.
4. David Wills, *The Bams Experiment*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1945, p. 141.
5. Wills, *Throw Away thy Rod* p. 45.
6. See E.T. Bazeley, *Homer Lane and the Little Commonwealth*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1928.
7. Cited in Maurice Bridgeland, *Pioneer Work with Maladjusted Children*, London: Staples, 1971, p. 107.
8. David Wills, *Homer Lane, a Biography*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1964, p. 19.
9. August Aichhorn, *Wayward Youth*, London: Imago, 1925.
10. Wills, *The Bams Experiment*, p. 81.
11. Wills, *The Bams Experiment*, pp. 22-23.
12. Marion Liebmann, *Restorative Justice*, London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007, p. 39.
13. John Lampen, *Mending Hurts*, London: Quaker Home Service, 1987, pp. 55-75.
14. Reader, *Of Schools and Schoolmasters*, p. 68.
15. Published by QRSE, 1985.
16. Wills, *Throw Away thy Rod*, p. 64.
17. *Report of the Committee on Maladjusted Children (the Underwood Report)*, H.M.S.O., 1955.
18. Howard Jones, *Reluctant Rebels*, London: Tavistock, 1960.
19. Bridgeland, *Pioneer Work with Maladjusted Children*, p. 244.
20. Kenneth Barnes, *Energy Unbound: The Story of Wennington School*, York: Sessions, 1980.
21. F.G. Lennhoff, *Exceptional Children*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1961.
22. Bridgeland, *Pioneer Work with Maladjusted Children*, pp. 89-95.
23. Wills, *The Bams Experiment*, p. 13.
24. Susan Robson, *An Exploration of Conflict Handling among Quakers*, PhD dissertation, University of Huddersfield, 2005.
25. Elaine Boyling, from a PhD thesis in preparation, Chapter 6. In her research she referred to the community as 'McGregor Hall' but she tells me it is no longer necessary to use this pseudonym.
26. Wills, *Throw Away thy Rod*, p. 77.
27. Barnes, *Energy Unbound*, p. 138.
28. Wills, *The Bams Experiment*, p. 81.
29. Elaine Boyling, 'Therapeutic Environments and the Religious Society of Friends', *Therapeutic Education* 32/1 (2011), pp. 64-67.
30. Children's Creative Response to Conflict Program, *The Friendly Classroom for a Small Planet*, ed. Priscilla Prutzman; Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1988; Stephanie Judson, *Manual on Nonviolence and Children*, Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1984; *Ways and Means: An Approach to Problem-solving*, Surrey: Kingston Friends Workshop Group, 1989; revised as *Ways and Means Today* (1996). This movement is described in my forthcoming e-book, *A Letter from James*.
31. There are three specific references to peace education in *Quaker Faith & Practice*, §13.03, 23.85, and 24.54. There is no quotation from David Wills.

## AUTHOR DETAILS

John Lampen holds a BA in Literæ Humaniores (Oxford 1963; MA 1967), a Diploma in Education (Oxford 1964), Certificate in Psychotherapy (Birmingham University 1974), and an M.Phil. in War Studies (Kings College, London, 2000). His publications include *Wait in the Light: The Spirituality of George Fox* (QHS, 1981); *Mending Hurts* (QHS, 1987); *The Peace Kit* (QHS, 1992); *Building the Peace: Good Practice in Community Relations Work in Northern Ireland* (Community Relations Council of N. Ireland, 1995); and, as editor, *No Alternative? Nonviolent Responses to Repressive Regimes* (Sessions, 2000).

Mailing address: 21 Heathfield Gardens, Stourbridge DY8 3YD, England.  
Email: [lampen@hopeproject.co.uk](mailto:lampen@hopeproject.co.uk); Website: [www.hopeproject.co.uk](http://www.hopeproject.co.uk).