

A 'Position of Peculiar Responsibility': Quaker Women and Transnational Humanitarian Relief, 1914–24

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Abstract

Given the scale of Quaker women's involvement in humanitarian responses to the First World War, they have received remarkably little attention in either Quaker historiography or the study of global conflict in this period. This article explores the responses of a network of Quaker women in Birmingham and their sense of personal responsibility to intervene on behalf of non-combatants affected by the war at home and abroad. It takes the relief work of Florence Barrow in Russia and Poland as a biographical case study to consider issues of motivation and practice, and how women relief workers found opportunity to exercise leadership and authority within Quaker relief structures. The article concludes with a discussion of the cultural transmission of a tradition of global concern within their families and women's meetings, and the role it played in shaping their identities as Quaker women and legitimising their activism.

Keywords

Florence Barrow, Birmingham, family, First World War, humanitarian relief, identity, leadership, Quaker women.

Introduction

We have been reminded that, owing to the information which for months past has been at our disposal, we are in a position of peculiar responsibility, and we have been urged to seek to meet this responsibility in view of the heart rending situation still existing. Our friend Theodora M. Wilson, who has recently returned from Zurich, has brought before us the terrible facts of the position as she learned them.

We ask Friends to acquaint themselves with these facts that their sympathy and love may be stirred, and that they may render help by every means in their power, & if possible rouse others to do the same.¹

This minute was agreed by the Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting on 17 June 1919, some seven months after the Armistice. It was prompted by Birmingham Friend Theodora M. Wilson's account of her recent travels in central Europe as part of the British delegation to the second congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). She had witnessed the effects of the continuing Allied food blockade on former enemies, a situation that she described at the recently held Yearly Meeting as 'the murder by slow process... of millions of women and children and old people'.² As an extract the minute captures two elements which will form the focus of this article: the sense of personal responsibility felt by local Friends to intervene in global concerns, and particularly how this sense of a 'peculiar responsibility' shaped Quaker women's involvement in transnational humanitarian relief.

The history of humanitarian aid during and immediately after the First World War has received surprisingly little scholarly attention until relatively recently, and the widespread relief activism of women in particular has been neglected in both local and national histories.³ Similarly, there is relatively little recent work on Quaker relief in this period, or indeed on twentieth-century Quaker relief generally. The standard histories are either brief overviews or were produced some years ago and written from an 'insider' perspective with the result that international relief work by Friends remains as one of the significant 'voids' in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Quaker history identified by H. Larry Ingle in 1997.⁴ The paucity of literature on the twentieth-century humanitarian activities of Quaker women in particular is surprising given the relative scale of their involvement.⁵ Greenwood in his history of Quaker relief work estimated

1 Minute 409, Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting, 17 June 1919, Birmingham Archives & Collections (hereafter BA&C), SF/2/1/1/1/29.

2 *The Friend* (6 June 1919), pp. 356–57.

3 Little, B., 'An Explosion of New Endeavours: global humanitarian responses to industrialized warfare in the First World War era', *First World War Studies* 5 (2014), pp. 1–16. Cabanes, B., *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism 1918–1924*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Jones, H., *Women in British Public Life, 1914–50: gender, power and social policy*, Harlow: Pearson, 2000, pp. 101–02; Oldfield S., 'Compiling the First Dictionary of British Women Humanitarians', *Women's Studies International Forum* 24 (2001), pp. 737–43.

4 Ingle, H. L., 'The Future of Quaker History', *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* 58 (1997), pp. 1–16. For examples of earlier historiography, see: Fry, A. R., *A Quaker Adventure: the story of nine years' relief and reconstruction*, New York: Frank-Maurice Inc., 1926. Scott, R. C., *Quakers in Russia*, London: Michael Joseph, 1964. Greenwood, J. O., *Quaker Encounters*, vol. i, *Friends and Relief*, York: William Sessions, 1975.

5 Among the few recent contributions are Oldfield, S., *Women Humanitarians: a biographical dictionary of British women active between 1900 and 1950*, London: Continuum, 2001. Storr, K.,

that of a total of 473 Friends War Victims Relief Committee workers who served in Europe during 1914 to 1918, 156 were women with a further 880 women involved in relief in the post-war period to 1923.⁶

This article draws on an ongoing research project into the activities of a network of Birmingham women Friends (including Theodora), who actively engaged in issues of peace, humanitarian relief, and educational and social reform on a transnational stage in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ It stems from an interest in how the local and the global were intertwined in their lives, motivation and activism, and is informed by recent scholarship utilising transnational biographical frameworks to explore subjects whose activities cross national borders and who are consequently, in the words of Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, often ‘lost to vision when a firmly national framework is held in place’.⁸ My aim here is not to narrate a full and chronological account of their activities or of Quaker relief in this period, rather I want first to consider how this sense of responsibility was manifested in the actions, values and practices that they evolved in response to war and its consequences, and secondly to explore how individual women were able to exercise leadership and authority within Quaker relief structures. Drawing on Sandra Stanley Holton’s analysis of the Priestman–Bright circle, I will argue that the Birmingham Quaker women under consideration here drew on strong feminine identities built on shared religious, social and political values, and on a tradition of intervention in global concerns, culturally transmitted within their families and extended kinship networks, and affirmed by their local Women’s Meetings.⁹ Furthermore, I will contend that the relief work in which they engaged during the First World War should not be viewed in isolation, but interpreted as part of a lifelong commitment to transnational humanitarian and social welfare. Following a brief summary of the relief work in which Birmingham Quaker women were engaged during and immediately after

Excluded from the Record: women, refugees and relief 1914–1929, Berne: Peter Lang, 2010. Roberts, S., ‘Exhibiting Children at Risk: child art, international exhibitions and Save the Children Fund in Vienna, 1919–1923’, *Paedagogica Historica* 45 (2009), pp. 171–90.

6 Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*, p. 194.

7 My group includes, among others, M. Catharine Albright (1859–1945), Margaret A. Backhouse (1887–1977), Florence M. Barrow (1876–1964), Geraldine Southall Cadbury (1865–1941), Evelyn Sturge (1875–1961), Mary D. Sturge (1865–1925), Francesca M. Wilson (1888–1981) and Theodora M. Wilson (1865–1947).

8 Curthoys, A., and Lake, M., (eds), *Connected Worlds: history in transnational perspective*, Canberra: The Australian National University E Press, 2005, pp. 10–11. See also Deacon, D., Russell, P., and Woollacott, A., (eds), *Transnational Lives: biographies of global modernity, 1700–present*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Jensen, K., and Kuhlman, E., (eds), *Women and Transnational Activism in Historical Perspective*, Dordrecht: Republic of Letters Publishing BV, 2010. Schechter, P. A., *Exploring the Decolonial Imaginary: four transnational lives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

9 Holton, S. S., *Quaker Women: personal life, memory and radicalism in the lives of women friends, 1780–1930*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007.

the First World War, in the first part of the article, I will go on to explore the values and practices demonstrated in the relief activities in Russia of one woman in particular, Florence Barrow. The emphasis will then shift to consider her leadership of the Quaker relief unit in Poland in the early 1920s in the context of the varied challenges and difficulties which faced the British and American relief workers in that location. I will conclude by broadening my focus to situate Florence in my wider group of Birmingham women Friends to explore their motivation for intervening transnationally in humanitarian issues, and specifically to assess the role played by the transmission of a tradition of global concern within their families in enabling their activism.

Quaker Birmingham and the First World War

By August 1914, Birmingham was home to a numerically small but disproportionately influential Quaker community. The interrelated families of Albright, Barrow, Cadbury, Gibbins, Lloyd, Southall, Sturge and Wilson (among others) were firmly established as members of the city's manufacturing, business and civic political elite. Similarly, the women of these families were disproportionately influential in women's organisations locally, and in local civil and philanthropic activism. Quaker women played leading roles in the Birmingham Women's Suffrage Society, Birmingham Women's Settlement and the local branch of the National Union of Women Workers (later National Council of Women).¹⁰ They engaged in a wide range of causes including temperance, educational initiatives, penal and housing reform, and the physical and moral welfare of working-class women and children in the city.

The outbreak of the First World War mobilised local Friends to act across a broad range of activities. In addition to campaigns for peace and their later support of local conscientious objectors, they provided considerable aid for refugees, 'enemy aliens' and other non-combatants at home and abroad. They were involved in national and local Quaker organisations including the Friends Emergency Committee and the Friends War Victims Relief Committee (hereafter FEWVRC),¹¹ and in ecumenical concerns such as local bodies in support of Belgian and Serbian refugees. They participated in fundraising, in propaganda and political advocacy work, and many served abroad in the field for considerable periods of time with the Friends' Ambulance Unit and the FEWVRC. Indeed, their endeavours had been reactivated by the Balkan wars of 1912–13, and extended well beyond 1918 into the mid-1920s and the interwar

10 See annual reports for these organisations and others held by BA&C.

11 The Friends Emergency Committee and the Friends War Victims Relief Committee combined in 1919 to form the Friends Emergency and War Victims Relief Committee. For the sake of consistency, and as FEWVRC is the form used by the Library of the Religious Society of Friends in the archival catalogues for the records, I have used this post-1919 acronym for the Committee throughout.

period, illustrating the need to recontextualise Quaker responses to the conflict as part of a broader humanitarian agenda. Local women Friends played an active role in all of these initiatives according to their particular interests, family and economic circumstances, and political perspectives. Several were active supporters of the controversial Women's International Peace Congress at The Hague. Catharine Albright, Geraldine Southall Cadbury, Sophia Sturge, Mary Snowden Braithwaite and Ethel C. Wilson were all members of the national British Committee of the Women's International Congress, and a local committee was formed in Birmingham in early 1915.¹² Six local women expressed a wish to travel to The Hague for the Congress, including Catharine Albright, Geraldine Cadbury and her daughter Dorothy, Sophia Sturge, and Florence Barrow and her sister-in-law Ethel (Mrs Harrison Barrow), but, like almost all the potential British participants, they were refused permission to travel.¹³

Quaker women were also involved in a variety of welfare organisations on the home front, including the Birmingham War Refugees Committee, which was established largely at the instigation of its chair Elizabeth Cadbury. It co-ordinated housing and employment, ran a lost relatives bureau, and opened a Belgian School in February 1916.¹⁴ Dr Mary Darby Sturge was its medical adviser, her sister Evelyn Sturge was superintendent of the Central Offices and Receiving Home in Islington Row, Birmingham, and Geraldine Cadbury ran the Belgian Maternity Home at 19 Carpenter Road. Sophia Sturge focussed her attention on conscientious objectors, among other wartime causes, and a number of local women Friends also undertook periods of relief or investigative work abroad, including, as we have seen, Theodora M. Wilson.¹⁵ Evelyn Sturge worked in relief in Holland in 1916,¹⁶ Catharine Albright visited Holland and later travelled on a fundraising visit for the FEWVRC to the USA,¹⁷ and Constance Smith worked in the Birmingham Kinderheim, a children's home in the Austrian Tyrol, in which Dr Mary Sturge was also closely involved.¹⁸ Francesca Wilson – originally from Newcastle, but who settled in Birmingham after the war –

12 *Towards Permanent Peace: a record of the women's international congress held at The Hague, April 28th–May 1st 1915*, London: 1915. WIL First Yearly Report, October 1915–October 1916, p. 4, LSE Archives, WILPF 2/1.

13 *Towards Permanent Peace*, p. 13. The Women's International League emerged out of The Hague Congress in 1915 and was known as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom from 1919.

14 Detailed records of this organisation are held by BA&C, MS 652.

15 Hughes, W. R., *Sophia Sturge: a memoir*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940.

16 *Dictionary of Quaker Biography*, FEWVRC World War 1, Library of the Society of Friends, London (hereafter LSF), entry for Evelyn Sturge.

17 Albright, M. C., 'Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee: outposts in Holland', *The Friend* (31 March 1916), pp. 201–02. Fry, *Quaker Adventure*, p. xxxi.

18 The home was one of the activities instigated by the Lord Mayor's Famine Fund established by William Adlington Cadbury during his Lord Mayoralty in 1919, BC&A, MS 3241.

worked in France, Corsica, Serbia, Russia and Vienna between 1914 and 1924,¹⁹ whilst Annie R. Wells was in Russia from July 1916 to November 1917.²⁰ With Annie in Russia was Florence Barrow, one of the most active of relief workers who spent a considerable period of time in France, Russia, Germany and Poland until the mid-1920s. In the following section I will discuss particular characteristics, values and practices that Florence employed in her relief work in Russia through a reading of the archive. These elements will be explored in relation to her background, and her previous activism with women of the urban poor in Birmingham. Reading the evolution of her relief work through this lens I will argue that her humanitarian philosophies and practices were not developed in isolation, but rather formed an integral part of her broader lifelong approach to the promotion of peace and social justice.

Florence Barrow:

Responsibility, Relief and Relationships—From Birmingham to Russia

Born in Birmingham, in 1876, Florence was the only daughter of businessman and former Lord Mayor Richard Cadbury Barrow and his wife Jane Harrison.²¹ Growing up in a middle-class Quaker family, her life leading up to the First World War displays numerous characteristics shared with my wider group of subjects. She was well educated, attending Edgbaston High School for Girls and subsequently taking extension classes in languages at Mason College, Birmingham, the forerunner of the University of Birmingham. She was actively involved in her local meeting at George Road, Edgbaston, and a lifelong supporter of the adult school movement, teaching a women's class from 1894 during her late teens. Together with her mother, brothers and sisters-in-law, she was a supporter of Birmingham Women's Suffrage Society and was active in a number of social welfare and reform initiatives in Birmingham.²² From 1904, following a period of training at St Hilda's Settlement in Bethnal Green, she involved herself in the work of Birmingham Women's Settlement, where she developed an interest in working-class housing. In common with the broader Settlement Movement, the Birmingham Women's Settlement provided residential accommodation for middle-class and educated women to live among the urban poor. Its aims were to foster social study and training in social work, whilst also providing a

19 Wilson, F. M., *In the Margins of Chaos: recollections of relief work in and between three wars*, London: John Murray, 1944. Roberts, S., 'Place, Life Histories and the Politics of Relief: episodes in the life of Francesca Wilson, humanitarian educator activist', PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010.

20 *Dictionary of Quaker Biography*, FEWVRC World War 1, LSF, entry for Annie R. Wells.

21 Biographical information is drawn from a range of sources and archival research including obituaries in *The Friend* (13 March 1964), pp. 302–03 and *The Birmingham Post* (4 March 1964). See also Sybil Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, pp. 16–17.

22 Annual reports of Birmingham Women's Suffrage Society, BA&C.

range of community and welfare services for the women and children of the neighbourhood. From February 1916, Florence worked at a quarantine station for Serbian refugees in Frioul near Marseilles, France, before joining a Quaker relief team bound for Buzuluk in Russia in July 1916.²³ In Buzuluk, she and fellow Birmingham Quaker Annie R. Wells worked on feeding, clothing and medical programmes, occupational workshops, orphanages and nurseries for children. Both women were in Russia during the Revolution of 1917.²⁴

Florence left a sizeable archive documenting her relief activities, including extensive correspondence, reports and publicity articles preserved in the FEWVRC files at Friends House Library, which are supplemented by collections of personal correspondence and papers.²⁵ A prolific writer, in addition to official business correspondence with the London office, she wrote regular letters to family and to her friend Gertrude Humpidge, with whom she shared her home in Frederick Road, Edgbaston.²⁶ She also kept a journal, parts of which were sent home in lieu of, or as an extension to, her letters. She drew on her journal and correspondence to draft fundraising literature and compile autobiographical reflections, some of which were clearly intended for publication. Autobiographical texts of this nature have long been considered as sources in which the self is performed, and scholars have emphasised the need to take account of the context of their creation and the author's consciousness of the intended audience.²⁷ Florence's writings are no exception. Like the letters of women missionaries, the correspondence of Quaker relief workers was generally written in the knowledge that it would be shared with an audience beyond the immediate recipient.²⁸ Letters to family and friends

23 *Dictionary of Quaker Biography*, FEWVRC World War 1, LSF, entry for Florence Mary Barrow.

24 Anne Rebecca Wells was the daughter of John and Elizabeth Wells of Sibford Gower. She attended Woodbrooke, 1904–05, and shortly afterwards became a health visitor in Birmingham. In 1923, she was appointed librarian at Woodbrooke. A member of Cotteridge Meeting she was also associated with Bournville Adult School. She died on 10 October 1956, aged 84. See obituary, Anne R. Wells, *The Friend* (26 October 1956), p. 945.

25 The Friends Library holds personal letters and autobiographical recollections relating to her experiences in Russia which Florence sent to Richenda Scott when the latter was writing her book *Quakers in Russia*.

26 Gertrude Humpidge (1865–1947) worked at the Birmingham Women's Settlement with Florence before being appointed as Birmingham General Hospital's first 'Lady Almoner' from 1912. See testimonial leaflet in LSF, Temp MSS 590/5.

27 See, for example, Roper, M., *The Secret Battle: emotional survival in the Great War*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009. Simon-Martin, M., 'Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's Travel Letters: performative identity-formation in epistolary narratives', *Women's History Review* 22 (2013), pp. 225–38. Summerville, P., 'Concluding Thoughts: performance, the self and women's history', *Women's History Review* 22 (2013), pp. 345–52.

28 Miller, R. A., 'The Missionary Narrative as Coercive Interrogation: seduction, confession and self-presentation in women's "letters home"', *Women's History Review* 15 (2006), pp. 751–71. Goodman, J., and Leach, C., "'At the Centre of a Circle whose Circumference Spans All Nations': Quaker women and the ladies' committee of the British

would often be circulated or read at meetings, and, unless marked 'private', correspondence with the office in London was routinely utilised for publicity and fundraising purposes. That being said, Florence's correspondence, journals and autobiographical recollections provide a vivid insight into her experiences as a relief worker, and into her practice and motivation.

Florence's sense of responsibility to intervene practically through personal service, and her gratitude for the opportunity to serve in this way, is a constant refrain in the archive, and is captured in the sentence that closes one of her letters from Frioul: 'I feel it is a great privilege to be here.'²⁹ Her years of personal visiting to the homes of the women served by the Birmingham Settlement stood her in good stead for the work that she and Annie Wells embarked upon after arriving in Buzuluk. One of their initial tasks was to spend several weeks in various outlying villages with an interpreter visiting hundreds of houses that included refugees to assess and document their needs, a task that required patience, stamina and emotional fortitude. In her autobiographical recollections, she reflected:

Before deciding exactly what form our relief work should take many hundreds of families of refugees were visited. I do not know that I ever have had a sadder & more depressing piece of work. To go into house after house & find old men, women, girls, children sitting inert unoccupied & hopeless, unwelcome guests in an already overcrowded home. One after another would tell of the good house they had left in the west surrounded by a pleasant fruitful garden.³⁰

Her recollections were based on the detailed entries made in her journals and letters in which she describes her visits, the people she encountered and the difficulties of communicating with the refugees. Language, and the need to communicate through an interpreter, was a constant barrier and there are several references to the difficulties of trying to learn Russian, even for Florence who already spoke French and German.³¹

Despite these difficulties her journal and correspondence abound with stories of visits to individual refugees and particular families who engaged her sympathy. Like her fellow relief worker Francesca Wilson, Florence emphasised the individual experience through personal vignettes that pepper her published and unpublished writings.³² Her descriptions stress the importance of personal interaction, and convey a sense of duty to hear, record and disseminate the personal stories of

and Foreign School Society, 1813–37', in Morgan, S., (ed.), *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 53–69.

29 Letter to Miss Fry, 7 March 1916, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/9/5/5/1.

30 Florence Barrow, *Recollections of Work in Buzuluk*, LSF, Temp MSS 590/4.

31 See, for examples, letters to Ruth Fry 18 (31) August 1916 and 19 September (20 October) 1917, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/7/1/11/2.

32 For this aspect of Francesca Wilson's writing, see Roberts, S. "'I Promised Them that I would Tell England about Them': a woman teacher activist's life in popular humanitarian education', *Paedagogica Historica* 47 (2011), pp. 171–90.

individual refugees, despite the inevitable similarities and repetitions of experience recounted to her:

In one house in one fair sized room there are 21 people living (5 families). The tragedy of it all is almost more than one can bear & we long for the time when we have some clothes to give or food for the children & can show our sympathy in a practical form. They do appreciate our visits I think though for they like to have someone to whom they can tell their troubles. In every house they need clothes & often would have no food but for the kindness of the villagers with whom they live ... Poor things one's heart aches for them & one feels how little some of the people in England realize how they have suffered. I certainly did not till I have had the chance of knowing the people & hearing them tell of it all.³³

As in the two quotations above, her journals and letters occasionally touch on the personal emotional impact of the work, its 'depressing' nature and how hard it sometimes was to bear. She was not alone in this and male relief workers also occasionally described the emotional effects of the sights with which they were confronted. Frederick Merttens, accompanying Florence on a visit to Germany in 1919, described a scene in which he and Edwin Gilberts visited children affected by the food blockade in a Berlin children's hospital, a 'sight [that] forced tears into our eyes, and we turned away too overcome for words'.³⁴ Like Gilberts, who dashed off to write up the experience for a newspaper, Florence clearly recognised the fundraising and propaganda potential of individual stories, particularly emotive stories related to women and children, and her journal entries were redrafted into articles and leaflets for those purposes. However, her outlook was also based on a personal sympathy and commitment to recognising and respecting the humanity of the individual and their experiences.

In her earlier work with the Birmingham Women's Settlement, Florence had participated in services aimed at poor women in particular, and elements of her relief work display similar characteristics. This included a motivation to promote the women's self-respect through facilitating their desire for gainful occupation, which was underpinned by her belief in the Quaker ethos of self-help, and performed a useful practical contribution to the cause.³⁵ In Russia, this took the form of occupational workshops for women refugees, a common technique in Quaker relief in this period and in later conflicts, such as the Spanish Civil War, as well as in the 1930s schemes for the unemployed in Birmingham in which Florence and Evelyn Sturge also participated. In Buzuluk, Florence organised sewing, knitting, weaving and fancy embroidery work, which not only contributed useful garments, but also earned participants a small wage. Like other female activists, the status of women in the countries in which she was

33 Journal entry, 20–24 September 1916, LSF, Temp MSS 590/1, A7, pp. 15–16.

34 Letter, Frederick Merttens, 13 September 1919, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/10/1/6/10.

35 Journal entry, LSF, Temp MSS 590/1, A19, pp. 5 and 7.

active appeared in her writings, and she was horrified, for example, that so few of the women with whom she worked in Buzuluk exercised their right to vote in a local election following the 1917 Revolution, writing home: 'Think how one felt to be here the first time the women of the country had a vote and no one knew enough to vote.'³⁶

Despite the power and class dynamic that inevitably coloured both their settlement work at home and their relief work abroad, Florence and the other Quaker women were also motivated by ideas of cross-class friendship between women. The theme runs throughout the activism of Florence's friend and co-worker Catharine Albright, a long-term member of the Women's Settlement committee and its warden, 1906–10. In 1916, Catharine extended the principles of the Settlement by founding the 'Community Club' for women in Birmingham, where women of all ranks could meet on common ground and which provided a space where they could socialise, learn from each other and exercise citizenship.³⁷ The same ethos of friendship, this time across the boundaries of nations, culture and language, informed their relief work. Florence placed great emphasis on building personal relationships with the recipients of relief as a means of living out her Quaker principles and providing a witness for peace. Although we have no independent record of how the displaced women felt, or how they viewed Florence's 'friendly visits', she clearly believed that 'Living in the villages among the people we were able to become their friends'.³⁸

Florence Barrow: Leadership and Concern in Poland, 1920–24

In the same way that philanthropy and settlement work at home provided opportunities for women to exercise authority, relief work within the structures of the FEWVRC provided an opportunity and a space for women Friends to exercise leadership and initiative. The best-known example is probably Hilda Clark, whose call to action stimulated the FEWVRC relief work during the First World War, and who led activities in France and subsequently in Vienna in the post-war period. Francesca Wilson also demonstrated autonomy and leadership in Vienna in the early 1920s, and later as the first Quaker relief worker in Murcia in Southern Spain during the Spanish Civil War. Florence was to experience a similar opportunity elsewhere. In January 1920, shortly after her return from an investigative mission to Germany, she agreed to go Poland on behalf of the FEWVRC's Poland and Russia subcommittee, of which she was a member alongside her brother Harrison Barrow and fellow Birmingham Friend (and Catharine's brother), William A. Albright. The purpose of this initial visit undertaken with W. A. Albright and Renshaw Watts was to investigate

36 Letter dated '18.11.17 (1.12.17)', LSF, Temp MSS 590/1.

37 Minutes of the Birmingham Community Club, BA&C, MS 3577.

38 Florence Barrow, *Recollections of Work in Buzuluk*, LSF, Temp MSS 590/4.

the housing needs of refugees returning from the Samarra district of Russia.³⁹ Following the presentation of a report of their findings, a sum of money was approved and Florence was requested to initiate the resulting work alongside the Polish relief worker Jadwiga Bialowiejska and Brian Mennell.⁴⁰ In June 1921, Florence became the leader of Quaker relief in Poland. In the section that follows I will provide an overview of the work of the Poland Unit prior to Florence's appointment as its head, together with some of the challenges it faced and their consequences for the team's morale and capacity to function effectively. I will then go on to explore how Florence's personal characteristics, skills and previous experiences contributed to her ability to assume authority, and enabled her to lead the Unit at a difficult time in its history.

The FEWVRC was active in Poland from 1919 and the Polish Unit engaged in a wide range of relief work including feeding, clothing, building houses and schools, medical relief through dispensaries and the disinfecting of people and their homes against typhus, and agricultural relief in which they supplied horses, co-ordinated ploughing and distributed implements, tools and seeds.⁴¹ The Quaker Unit in Poland included British and American relief workers and was supported and overseen by both the FEWVRC and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). The British workers were, however, in the majority, and by summer 1920, of 80 workers in the field in Poland 68 were British.⁴²

Poland was a particularly challenging field of service for a number of reasons. Conditions were hard, and the workers faced a constant battle with the weather. Travelling from one outpost to another could take days, and communication with each other, let alone with the FEWVRC in London or the AFSC in Philadelphia, posed a constant difficulty. The workers' living conditions were overcrowded, and were described as 'small and poor' by one visitor.⁴³ The records are interspersed with instances of illnesses such as typhus among the relief workers, which in a few cases resulted in death.⁴⁴ These practical difficulties were exacerbated by the uncertain military situation, political tensions with the local authorities who

39 Minute 123, Poland and Russia Subcommittee, 28 January 1920, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/COMM/PORU/M1.

40 Report of Investigation in the district of Hrubieszow made by W. A. Albright, Renshaw Watts and Florence Barrow, 1 March 1920, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/8/4/11; Minute 167, Poland and Russia Subcommittee, 10 March 1920, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/COMM/PORU/M1. Jadwiga Bialowiejska joined the FEWVRC Unit in Poland from July 1919 and later became head of the orphanage at Kolpin. She was shot and killed in 1940. See *The Friend* (24 January 1941), p. 45.

41 For a detailed account, see Fry, *A Quaker Adventure*, pp. 248–97.

42 Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*, p. 237.

43 Report of Dr E. A. Steiner, 14 May 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/8/4/6/2.

44 Gertrude Powicke and Richard Reynolds Ball both died in Poland as a result of typhus. See Fry, *A Quaker Adventure*, p. 255.

suspected Friends of religious bias and proselytising, and by personal discord within the Unit.⁴⁵

Reports of disagreements and dissension among the workers were reaching London from the beginning and before Florence embarked for Poland.⁴⁶ Workers in the field felt overstretched and understaffed in the face of the sheer volume of work. There were personality differences among the team, and a feeling that the administration in London did not understand their difficulties and had made unwise decisions relating to the deployment of particular members of staff and the direction of the work. The following extract from a letter written by Harry Stevens in January 1920, although unusual in its tone, provides a flavour of the hardships and low morale:

That same fact – overwork and rundown – explains so much of the silence of which London so bitterly complains. The silence, such as there has been, is very largely London’s fault for leaving us understaffed for so long. There comes a point in the daily grind when it is impossible to work and think too, and in such work as ours that point comes quickly... You are earnest in your appeal for ‘local colour.’ Do you not realise that there is no local colour in Poland, that life here for the Poles is all one drab monotone, a dreary unending grey? Having described one family you have described all, save for wearisome, unenlivening changes that are not worth recording... After an afternoon of visiting for relief one feels helpless, hopelessly helpless, to do any service that will touch the heart of the problem.⁴⁷

This situation was not helped by the tensions that existed between the British and American workers. Tammy Proctor has recently discussed the often problematic relationship between American and British Quaker relief teams in this period. She ascribed this tension to difficulties over gender and authority, as British women relief workers were used to assuming leadership roles and were ‘irritated’ by the leadership of American Quaker relief, which remained firmly in the hands of men. Proctor also argued that fundamentally different approaches to relief caused issues, with the Americans favouring scientific, impersonal mass relief, and the British workers’ stress on personal relationships and service.⁴⁸ Farah Mendlesohn has noted similar differences of approach between the British and American relief workers in Spain during the Civil War.⁴⁹ Both London and Philadelphia were

45 For an account of the political and religious suspicions that surrounded the Poland Unit, see Back, L. S., ‘The Quaker Mission in Poland: relief, reconstruction, and religion’, *Quaker History* 101 (2012), pp. 1–23.

46 See, for example, Poland and Russia Subcommittee, 26 September 1919, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/COMM/PORU/M1.

47 Letter from Harry Stevens, Zewiercie, 23 January 1920, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/8/4/6/1, emphasis in the original.

48 Proctor, T. M., ‘An American Enterprise?: British participation in US food relief programmes (1914–1923)’, *First World War Studies* 5 (2014), pp. 29–42.

49 Mendlesohn, F. J., ‘The Ethics of Friends’ Relief Work in Republican Spain’, *Quaker*

concerned that these tensions were hampering the work of the Poland Unit, and in May 1921, Dr E. A. Steiner was asked to investigate. His report bears out Proctor's point to some degree, and although he concluded that the cause was 'not nationality', he described resentment and differences of opinion between British and American workers and their techniques. The election of the American William Fogg as leader of the Unit in place of the British Dr Haigh had also contributed to the problem. Steiner concluded that the Unit lacked focus, needed to reprioritise, and that although Fogg was 'a Christian nobleman', who had borne with a difficult situation with great patience, he 'perhaps [lacked] certain qualities essential to leadership'.⁵⁰

Some British workers, however, agreed that the American approach was preferable and represented the future. Bernard Priestman, writing in May 1921, considered that Steiner had avoided stating the difficult truth that the Americans were, in Priestman's opinion, more talented and effective than their British counterparts. He commented:

With infinite love and care we... help the few and they brush past us to help the many. We spend sleepless nights in trucks to succour students and individuals whom we know perhaps personally and come home to find all the shine taken out of it by another fine bit of American impersonal thinking.⁵¹

These sentiments would appear to be in direct contrast to the approach favoured by Florence and other British women, although without further research it is difficult to judge whether this reflected a personal view on Priestman's part, or a more widespread gendered difference among the British workers. He went on to urge that the British approach should be abandoned in favour of America taking the lead, and concluded that 'no Englishman should permit himself to take charge from W. Fogg'.⁵²

It was in fact an English woman who replaced Fogg. In June 1921, London and Philadelphia sent out a 'Commission of Four' (Rufus M. Jones, Wilbur K. Thomas, Harrison Barrow and Frederick Rowntree) to investigate the problem further. Like Steiner, the commission was loath to accept that the issues were a result of national differences, and it concluded that the issues rose from a lack of 'team-work' that embodied the right spirit, coupled with a lack of loyalty to the leader of the Unit. It recommended that the work in Poland should be closed down over a period of six months, and that for this period Florence

History 88 (1999), pp. 1–23.

⁵⁰ Report of Dr E. A. Steiner, 14 May 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/8/4/6/2.

⁵¹ Letter, Bernard Priestman, 13 May 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/8/4/6/2.

⁵² Letter, Bernard Priestman, 13 May 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/8/4/6/2.

be asked to lead the Unit of 54 workers, with an American as her assistant.⁵³ Their faith in her was no doubt helped by the presence of her brother on the Commission, and her previous close working relationships with Rowntree and Albright on the Poland and Russia subcommittee. A telegram was sent to London, and at a special meeting on 25 June 1921, Florence was confirmed as leader of the Unit.⁵⁴ By January 1922, some six months later, it appeared that Florence and her American assistant head, L. Oscar Moon, had successfully addressed the spirit of the Unit, and it was resolved to carry on the work. At a special meeting on 3 January, the members of the Poland Unit thanked the subcommittee by letter for 'the privilege of acting as their almoners in the Field', and the meeting expressed its 'deep gratitude to Florence M. Barrow for accepting the leadership of the Unit at a difficult time and for all she has done to help to create the atmosphere of happy unity and loyal co-operation which characterises the Poland Unit'.⁵⁵ But how was this change brought about?

Some of it was no doubt due to Florence's personality, and there are a number of references to her calm and authoritative presence and the quiet authority that she projected. Francesca Wilson who visited Florence in Poland on her way to Buzuluk in September 1922, herself a strong personality, described some of the traits that made her suitable for leadership:

She had large, quiet, grey eyes, a quiet, unhurried manner, sympathy that was profound and genuine, but unsentimental and practical, and the kind of selflessness and appreciation of other people that had impressed me in Dr. Hilda Clark. I was not surprised that the Unit was doing a living work under her leadership.⁵⁶

Similarly, a testimony after her death drew attention to her deep interest in people, and her gift for seeing what needed to be done and initiating practical schemes to meet the need, concluding that her 'quiet and modest' manner and outward appearance 'gave little indication of the power within'.⁵⁷ She also brought a strong spiritual commitment to relief work and at an earlier meeting of the Poland and Russia subcommittee had emphasised that the need for 'deep concern, leadership and co-operation'.⁵⁸ Her own attitude to the differences between the British and American workers appears to have been conciliatory, feeling that each approach brought something of value. Writing in 1923, when some tension remained, particularly with Wilbur Thomas, who was critical of the work in

53 Report, 17 June 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/8/4/6/2. It also made detailed recommendations as to budget and deployment of personnel.

54 Minute 540, Poland and Russia Subcommittee, 25 June 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/COMM/PORU/M2.

55 Minute 709, Poland and Russia Subcommittee, 3 January 1922, LSF, YM/MfS/FREWVRC/COMM/PORU/M2.

56 Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos*, p. 140.

57 Testimony, Yearly Meeting Proceedings, 1965, pp. 66–67.

58 Minute 306, Poland and Russia Subcommittee, 11 August 1920, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/COMM/PORU/M1.

Poland, she maintained that better results would be gained ‘if the American + English outlooks can be combined. Do you not think that broadly speaking the American plans + sees large schemes more quickly than the English + that we sometimes miss much for want of a wide vision?’⁵⁹ Florence herself appears to have had good working relationships with individual Americans on the team and was particularly close to Dr Mary B. Tatum, who joined the Mission in spring 1921, and with whom she corresponded for some time.⁶⁰ Regretting Tatum’s departure from the mission due to illness, Florence wrote ‘I have never ceased to miss you & Juliana [Mary’s sister]... It does make such a difference to work with Friends who understand your outlook.’⁶¹

Florence also brought skills and a confidence borne out of years of administrative and organisational experience in the local structures of the Religious Society of Friends, the adult school movement and women’s associations. A number of scholars have related Quaker women’s skills and experiences in the administration and committee structures of their local meetings to their assumption of leadership roles in civil philanthropic and political spheres.⁶² Florence appears to have drawn particularly on her experiences of adult school methods to foster the team-work that the Commission of Four found wanting, by encouraging opportunities to engage in study circles and discussion.⁶³ A letter from Bernard Priestman to F. J. Tritton in September 1921 described a session in which ‘Miss Barrow’ presented a paper on ‘Social Work in England’. Priestman’s brief description of her paper provides an insight into her methods of encouraging a particular ethos within the team and of her conception of relief work as part of a broader faith-inspired reform project which contributed to her witness for peace overall. According to Priestman her paper:

was absolutely it! A trumpet call to Social [*sic*] work. It started, if my memory serves, with references to her own first awakening to the possibilities before the trained [... social worker] (consequent upon lectures by Mrs Bosanquet) and after a most interesting enumeration of the Welfare programme in Birmingham ended by showing how the ‘effects’ always should bring us into grips with the

59 Letter, 22 April 1923, LSF, YM/MfS/FSC/PO/1/1, emphasis in the original.

60 Minute 490, Poland and Russia Subcommittee, 9 March 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/COMM/PORU/M2.

61 Letter, 19–20 December 1922, LSF, Temp MSS 873.

62 For example, Morgan, S., ‘Introduction: women, religion and feminism’, in Morgan, S., (ed.), *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 3. Goodman, J., and Leach, C., “‘At the Centre of a Circle whose Circumference Spans All Nations’: Quaker women and the Ladies Committee of the British and Foreign School Society, 1813–37”, in Morgan, S., (ed.), *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900*, p. 53. O’Donnell, E., ‘Woman’s Rights and Woman’s Duties: Quaker women in the nineteenth century, with specific reference to the North East Monthly Meeting of Women Friends’, PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 2000, pp. 17–18.

63 Freeman, M., *The Quaker Extension c.1905–1930: the Yorkshire committee*, Borthwick Papers no. 112, York: University of York, 2008, pp. 16–21.

causes. Ill-health—housing. Unemployment—modern industrialism. Ill-health and Unemployment combined—war. I ought to add that the Religious note was sounded clearly at the beginning.⁶⁴

A few weeks later, at a further meeting on study circle lines, Florence used the adult school lesson handbook to open the discussion.⁶⁵

The recommendation of the Commission of Four that the work be closed down within months did not transpire and Florence and the Unit did not leave Poland until 1924. In her last months there she was working on the establishment of an agricultural training school and orphanage at Kolpin and an industry scheme providing work for women, two schemes that she hoped would leave a sustainable legacy and with which she kept in contact for some years after her departure.⁶⁶

Genealogies of Activism—The Making of World Citizens

Florence was motivated by a strong sense of responsibility to intervene in transnational issues of peace and social justice. In Birmingham, she was part of an active network of women Friends who were similarly motivated, and who perceived personal intervention as a natural part of their responsibilities and identities as Quaker women. Like Florence, they possessed a global outlook that did not recognise local or national boundaries. In the section that follows, I will focus on the role that family culture and tradition played in the development of this outlook. Several women from this group were part of an extended kinship network in which shared values and attitudes were transmitted from one generation to another, and in which women's activism and leadership were enabled by the sharing of memories through the preservation of archives and the telling of family stories.

The significant part played by family and home in the evolution of this shared identity was captured in an obituary for Catharine Albright, Florence's close friend, colleague and Chairman of the Friends Service Council 1928–33, following her death in 1945:

How is it that the news of the death of a lady of 86 in a Worcestershire village will come with so strong a sense of personal loss, so great a thankfulness for the inspiration of her life to out-of-the-way villagers in Madagascar, to workers in hospitals and schools in India and China, in Palestine and among the mountains of Lebanon, to friends in the United States and others on the Continent of Europe? The answer may be sought, in part at least, in the Quaker home in Edgbaston, where she grew up as one of eight brothers and sisters. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs.

64 Letter, 21 September 1921, LSF, YM/MfS/FSC/PO/1/1.

65 Minutes, 28 October 1921 and letter, 6 November 1921, both in LSF, YM/MfS/FSC/PO/1/1.

66 Letter, 16 January 1924, LSF, YM/MfS/FSC/PO/1/1.

Arthur Albright, believed, before all lesser considerations, that their family was ‘just part of God’s great family,’ and that time, money and gifts of heart and mind were to be accounted for to God. It was their business if slaves were suffering in Africa and America, just as it was their concern if people in their own city were in want or sick in body or mind, and in need of any help the family could give. So, from her early years Miss Albright became a world citizen.⁶⁷

This picture of a Quaker home in which boys and girls were socialised and nurtured into a sense of responsibility to act on both a local and global stage is a factor in the upbringing of all of my group of women, and it is no accident that both Catharine and Florence collaborated closely with siblings, in their case, brothers. Catharine shared a number of causes with her brother William Arthur Albright, not least their collaboration in various FEWVRC initiatives.⁶⁸ Similarly, Florence shared several aspects of her humanitarian activism with her brother Harrison Barrow, including membership of the Poland and Russia subcommittee of the FEWVRC, and with other members of her extended family, including Harrison’s wife Ethel, and Agnes, who married her brother Walter.

Florence, Catharine, Evelyn and Mary D. Sturge, Sophia Sturge and the other Birmingham women who engaged in humanitarian aid during the First World War could also draw on a historical model of an active feminine Quaker identity through their mothers, grandmothers and aunts who were involved in the humanitarian campaigns of the nineteenth century, particularly the anti-slavery cause. The Albright, Barrow, Cadbury, Southall and Sturge families were bound together by multiple kinship relationships that formed the basis of a tradition of participation in global causes which spanned the generations. Quaker women were prominent among those Birmingham citizens described by historian Catherine Hall as possessing the ‘energising identity’ of the abolitionist, a feminine identity founded on a mental and emotional world ‘peopled with numerous others: imagined “sisters” suffering under slavery’.⁶⁹ Florence’s great aunts, the sisters Maria Cadbury and Emma Cadbury Gibbins, were heavily involved in the Birmingham Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves.⁷⁰ Founded in 1825, the Birmingham Society was, as Clare Midgley has documented, ‘the first, the largest, the most influential and the longest lasting’ of the women’s anti-slavery associations.⁷¹ Evelyn and Mary D. Sturge could look back to their grandmother, the Ladies Society’s founder Mary Lloyd, and

67 *Bromsgrove, Droitwich and Redditch Weekly Messenger* (2 June 1945), BA&C, MS 1509/6/23.

68 Fry, *A Quaker Adventure*, p. xxvii.

69 Hall, C., *Civilising Subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, pp. 21, 18.

70 Both were sisters of her grandmother Sarah Cadbury, who married John Barrow in 1823.

71 Midgley, C., *Women against Slavery: the British campaigns, 1780–1870*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 43, 45. The archives of the Society are held by BA&C, MS 3173.

to their mother Sara Lloyd, who with her husband Wilson Sturge was active in Quaker humanitarian relief with the Dukhobors in Cyprus, with Finns after the Crimean wars, and with French peasants in the war of 1870–71.⁷² Although Wilson's uncle, Joseph Sturge VI, is the best-known anti-slavery campaigner in the family, Joseph's sister Sophia was also an active member of the Ladies Society, and its secretary until her death, an ideal model for her niece and Joseph's daughter, also named Sophia.⁷³ The elder Sophia's sister in law, and aunt of Catharine Albright, Lydia Sturge was also a one-time secretary of the Ladies Society.⁷⁴ Women from these families were also active in feminist causes and Evelyn and Mary's unmarried aunt Eliza was an active suffragist and the first woman elected to Birmingham School Board. Like the women of the Priestman-Bright circle, therefore, Florence, Catharine and the other activists of the First World War could draw inspiration and affirmation from examples of strong feminine identities which Holton has argued were 'at once feminine and authoritative, domestic and public, religious and secular'.⁷⁵

Holton has further argued that the women of the Priestman-Bright family played a key role in preserving and promoting family memories, and the archives that carried them, as 'emotional, psychological and spiritual resources for the men and women of this circle'.⁷⁶ We can see a similar motivation among the Birmingham women, as Helen Smith has demonstrated in her work on Elizabeth Taylor Cadbury.⁷⁷ The archives of the Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves were preserved by the Sturge women, who presented the collection to Birmingham Library, and Sara Wilson Sturge penned a privately published memoir of her mother, the Society's founder, Mary Lloyd.⁷⁸ This memory of activism served to legitimise the actions of a new generation of women, and it was reaffirmed in the conferences of the Warwickshire North Women's Monthly Meetings. Sandra Holton and Margaret Allen have identified women's meetings, despite their lack of equality within the structures of the Society of Friends, as a space which facilitated 'a feminine identity notable for its strength', and which promoted moral and religious reform.⁷⁹ From the 1890s,

72 *Dictionary of Quaker Biography*, LSF, entries for Wilson Sturge (1834–1899) and Sara Sturge, née Lloyd (1831–1922).

73 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 314–16; Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 80.

74 Lydia was the sister of Arthur Albright. Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 189.

75 Holton, S. S., 'Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement', *Women's History Review* 14 (2005), p. 378.

76 Holton, *Quaker Women*, p. 2.

77 Smith, H., 'Quaker Women, Family Archives and the Construction of Identity: analysing the memoirs and personal papers of Elizabeth Taylor Cadbury (1858–1951)', *Quaker Studies* 16 (2011), pp. 124–34.

78 Sturge, S. W., *Memoir of Mary Lloyd of Wednesbury, 1795–1865*, Birmingham: privately published, 1921.

79 Holton, S. S., and Allen, M., 'Offices and Services: women's pursuit of sexual equality within the Society of Friends, 1873–1907', *Quaker Studies* 2 (1997), p. 5.

through the interwar period, the Birmingham conferences regularly returned to the role of female Friends in the past, particularly in the anti-slavery campaigns. However, like other Quaker women of the time, they also demonstrated an active interest in that ‘touchstone of the Quaker Renaissance’: the practices, beliefs and spiritual leadership of early Friends, including women (and it is interesting to note that Mabel Brailsford’s book on early Quaker women was published in 1915).⁸⁰ On 14 November 1905, for example, Rachel Anna Albright King, older sister of Catharine and W. A. Albright, presented a paper entitled ‘Some Recollections of the Part Friends Took in the Anti-Slavery Struggle’.⁸¹ In her paper, she recalled shopping as a child with her mother (Rachel Stacey, daughter of George Stacey of Tottenham and his wife Deborah Lloyd), ‘when great pains were taken to get print dresses & sugar which were not made by slaves’.⁸² She went on to talk of the activities of her father Arthur Albright, who was one of the founders of the Birmingham Freedmen’s Aid Association in 1864, and of her American father-in-law, Joshua King.⁸³ She reminisced about the visits of US abolitionists to the family home and recounted her grandfather George Stacey’s visit to Levi Coffin in America. Rachel Anna’s recollections were complemented by Sara Wilson Sturge’s account of her mother’s role, while Catherine Wilson showed the gathering abolitionist medals that she wore as a child. Maria Joel Cadbury closed the 1905 meeting by connecting the past and the present in her contribution on contemporary slavery in the Congo and the work that still needed to be done.⁸⁴

This interest in history underpinned their responses to contemporary concerns and sat alongside a preoccupation with women’s status in the Religious Society of Friends and its ministry, as well as the social, political and humanitarian issues of the day including peace, anti-opium campaigns, Armenian relief and refugee issues. On 12 November 1918, for example, Florence Barrow and Annie R. Wells both spoke on their relief work with refugees in Russia.⁸⁵ Thirty years later, on 9 March 1948, Margaret Backhouse, who lived in Birmingham from 1914 to the Second World War when she worked as a lecturer at Westhill College, returned to the women’s conference to recount her experiences of accepting the Nobel Prize on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends a few months earlier.⁸⁶ In her Nobel acceptance address delivered in Oslo on 12

80 Allen, M., ‘Matilda Sturge: “renaissance woman”’, *Women’s History Review* 7/2 (1998), p. 214. Brailsford, M. R., *Quaker Women 1650–1690*, London: Duckworth & Co., 1915.

81 Minute Book, 1895–1907, 14 November 1905, BA&C, SF/2/1/1/2/1/8.

82 Minute Book, 1895–1907, 14 November 1905, BA&C, SF/2/1/1/2/1/8.

83 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 394. In 1890, Rachel Anna Albright married Wilson King, the American Consul in Birmingham. See her obituary, *The Friend* (21 December 1928), pp. 1164–65.

84 Minute Book, 1895–1907, 14 November 1905, BA&C, SF/2/1/1/2/1/8.

85 Minute Book, 1907–34, 12 November 1918, BA&C, SF/2/1/1/2/1/9.

86 Minute Book, 1935–60, 9 March 1948, BA&C, SF/2/1/1/2/1/10.

December 1947, she tried to provide her audience with an understanding of the history and basic principles that underpinned Quaker service. Like Florence before her she placed great emphasis on personal relationships and of the importance of entering meaningfully into the lives of others. Emphasising the long history of Quaker humanitarian service, she highlighted the significance of the tradition of female activism and leadership, writing that ‘women take an equal, and often a leading part... Some of the most daring projects have been undertaken by women who cared so deeply for their neighbours, even though they had never seen them, that God cast out their fear.’⁸⁷

Conclusion

[W]e are convinced that the sufferings these people have undergone & are undergoing has a special claim upon us whose homes have not been destroyed by war or who have not been transported as unwelcome guests into districts 1000’s [sic] of miles away there to drag out year after year a dreary & miserable existence.⁸⁸

The women on whom this article has focussed were acutely mindful of their personal responsibility to respond to the ‘special claim’ that they felt was placed upon them by non-combatants living with the consequences of the First World War and other conflicts, irrespective of national borders. The interventions that they made in response were rooted in their faith and motivated by an opposition to war in all its forms. They conceived of their humanitarian relief work during and immediately after the First World War as part of their witness for peace, and a constructive contribution to international understanding and friendship. Rather than an isolated event stemming from that particular conflict, it was part of a broader commitment which was inextricably connected to their social activism at home on the local stage. In the interwar period they busied themselves with causes from unemployment relief and industrial issues, to education, housing and penal reform, and the welfare of working class women and children. In the 1930s, several returned to international humanitarian issues, including the Spanish Civil War and the welfare of Jewish and other refugees fleeing fascism in Europe. Theodora Wilson combined her activism on behalf of the WILPF with her work for working-class mothers as a Labour Councillor and chair of Birmingham City Council’s Maternity and Child Welfare Committee. Evelyn Sturge worked with the unemployed and assisted with housing and employment for refugees in 1930s and 1940s Birmingham. Francesca Wilson abandoned her career as a teacher in the city to spend long periods undertaking Quaker relief in Spain, before following the Republican refugees over the border to Southern France and later working in post-Second World War Germany for the United Nations Relief and

87 Backhouse, M. A., *The International Service of the Society of Friends: les prix Nobel en 1947*, Stockholm: Kungliga Boktryckeriet, P.A. Norstedt & söner, 1949, p. 241.

88 Florence Barrow, *Recollections of Work in Buzuluk*, FSL, Temp MSS 590/4.

Rehabilitation Administration. Florence Barrow joined the local branch of the Independent Labour Party with her brother Harrison in 1919 and, following her return from Poland, threw herself into housing reform.⁸⁹ As one of the founding members of the Copec Housing Improvement Society, formed as a result of William Temple's Christian Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship held in Birmingham in 1924, she spent decades taking a very practical approach to the improvement of working-class housing in the city.⁹⁰ Florence continued to be active in humanitarian causes throughout the interwar period through her sustained involvement with Quaker concerns in Russia and Poland, and her broader participation in the Friends Service Council, visiting Syria, Salonika and Egypt on its behalf. In the 1930s, she engaged with the situation in Germany and Austria, and spent a month in Poland in 1936 revisiting some of the families with whom she had worked over a decade earlier.⁹¹

The lifelong activism in which Florence and fellow Quaker women engaged formed a vital part of their identities as Quaker women. They consciously drew upon a proud sense of a female humanitarian legacy, nurtured and transmitted within their extended kinship networks through the preservation of archives and biographical testimonies and the telling of family stories within the home and in their local Women's Monthly Meeting. This sense of affiliation with an interventionist feminine identity and heritage was a source of strength which supported and legitimised both their activism and their assumption of authority and leadership.

Author Details

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89 Minutes, Birmingham branch ILP, 20 March 1919, BA&C.

90 Fenter, F. M., *Copec Adventure: the story of Birmingham Copec House Improvement Society*, Birmingham: The Birmingham Copec House Improvement Society, 1960.

91 Barrow, F. M., 'Friendship Visits in Poland', *The Wayfarer* 15 (1936), pp. 176–77.