

Guest Editorial

History, Reappraisal, Transmission

One consequence of the fierce competition for academic funding, increasingly apparent since the 2007 financial crisis, is that few days pass without a press story questioning what history is for, why it is important and how historians should communicate to engage audiences. It should come as no surprise to readers of *Quaker Studies* in particular when I suggest that reflection is imperative for measured assessment, to invigorate ideas and discussions, and to nurture practice. It will also not be a shock if I say that reappraisal is the lifeblood of history and that it is key to this special issue in particular, as, unusually for this multi-disciplinary journal, the focus is on history. How history is done, what it centres on and how it might inform are, therefore, matters that merit space in this introduction to the contents—the products not only of the 2015 ‘Nonconformist Responses to the First World War’ Quaker Studies Research Association (QSRA) conference, but also of a roundtable discussion at the 2015 American Academy of Religion conference, as well as reviews of other published scholarship.

The George Richardson Lecture was given by Brycchan Carey at the 2015 QSRA conference. In the article from his lecture, ‘Anthony Benezet, Antislavery Rhetoric and the Age of Sensibility’, found in this issue, Carey considers eighteenth-century Pennsylvania Quaker Benezet’s skill at deploying sentimental rhetoric to collapse divisions (imagined or otherwise) in communicating to Friends and non-Friends alike the evils of slavery. For Carey, as for Benezet, the grammar of sensibility of a ‘man of feeling’ did considerably more than move people intellectually and emotionally. It moved people physically, driving the need to *do something*, to effect change in the world for future generations. We find in reflections upon Benezet’s writing—of a pedagogical and antislavery nature—something that reaches into a question at the heart of all our endeavours: what is our work *for*; what does it *do*? In Benezet’s sensibility towards animals, in the (perhaps apocryphal) release of a live mouse from a tiny pillory constructed by two of Benezet’s pupils to punish the creature’s stealing of cheese, we can see our own ideas, our sympathies with the past, let slip on the world. Carey’s construction of

his lecture and article echo our own concerns about the passage of our work into the public sphere, for he turns towards how Benezet's sensibility has been eroded or understood once removed from its context. Carey also conveys what are evoked as tensions within a 1762 antislavery text, when Benezet 'the schoolteacher... [educated] and [informed] his readers' and 'Benezet the campaigner, fired with moral indignation... [urged] his readers to join in his emotional journey'. In my reading of Carey's piece, I see the infectious quality of ideas ensured by the articulacy of argument through well-chosen means of transmission.

In each of the remaining five original articles of this special issue, we can see the vignette technique utilised by Benezet to reach his readers and humanise the subject of his work. As the centenary of the First World War approached, the UK government began planning how they might mark the battles and lives lost between 1914 and 1918. At the same time, educators, heritage practitioners and communities began thinking about how their work and activities might contribute to a more rounded and reflective picture of a conflict, the seeds of which were planted years before, and the aftermath that touches us still. This special issue contributes to the re-evaluation of myths and cultural memories that have grown up and been cultivated since the first visitation of 'total war' on the twentieth century. As such, the contents challenge the dominant narratives, both of a pro-war population in which everyone who volunteered—male or female, for the frontline or 'home front'—enthusiastically banged a drum for the fight, as well as the ongoing disparagement of those who rejected violence in all its forms. However, the contributions here also remind us that by drawing battle lines against war some have fostered their own myths of a vociferous, unilateral pacifist response. The truth is rarely so clear cut. Recognising the diverse range of responses by Friends to the First World War offers those involved in Quaker studies an opportunity to examine how faith and conscience in modern, extraordinary circumstances shape beliefs, inform decisions and manifest in actions.

Thomas C. Kennedy, the foremost historian of UK Quakers in the twentieth century, offers an overview of the discord found within the Religious Society of Friends; 'A Body Divided: British Quakers, Patriotism and War, 1899–1919' acts as a positioning paper for the First World War content of this issue. Set against a backdrop of the Quaker Renaissance and the Boer Wars, Kennedy draws attention to a generational rift that often meant older Friends accommodated the wartime State and younger Friends—or at least those who had not joined either the Friends' Ambulance Unit or the armed forces, which up to a third of men of politician-defined 'fighting age' did during 1914/18—rejected placing themselves at its service. While noting the various divisions among Friends and Quaker-linked groups and individuals that were strewn across the path of the war, Kennedy is clear that the conflict at least helped to cement the peace testimony as a central tenet of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Kennedy mentions John William Graham, one of the most prominent British Quakers and peace activists of the early twentieth century, and his vacillations

surrounding the potential call-up of his 'military-age' son. Joanna Dale's article in this issue carefully unfurls Graham's scientific and intellectual influences to describe his belief that war was part of and necessary to human evolution and that Quakers were at the vanguard of helping to shepherd evolution towards a world free from conflict. This meant that, on the eve of the First World War, Graham was arguing for the rejection of militarism, and at its outbreak was affected by the Spirit that energised his local Manchester meetings. While Graham initially found it difficult to understand the absolute rejection of wartime service, he was one of the most passionate advocates for conscientious objectors (COs) and went on to write the 'official history' of their most dogged of defenders, the No-Conscription Fellowship.

Owain Gethin Evans' article also takes the shades of grey apparent in Graham and considers them across the wide spectrum between deciding to fight and refusing any form of war service. He looks at the small number of Quaker men in Wales—a nation traditionally nonconformist in religion and politics, though not a stronghold of Quakerism—in order to discuss decisions of conscience. To do so, Evans explores the Welsh context of press and personalities to ascertain how Friends and their peace testimony were viewed, as well as develops a regional landscape of faith and action, from the locations of meetings, speeches and internment sites, to the gathering of aid for refugees and people in anti-conscription activities. Paying attention to absolutists, those who undertook work of 'national service', men who decided to join up and offered their resignation to their meeting, and those who were killed, the article suggests that individual decisions affected the comparatively small number of Quakers in Wales deeply.

Among these decisions, Evans includes membership of the Friends' Ambulance Unit (FAU). In my own contribution to this special issue, I reveal for the first time the behind-the-scenes negotiations that took place between the powerful and politically connected London-based steering committee of the FAU and the wartime government. The compromises brokered a 'middle course' between fighting and absolutism, created a space for consciences of many different hues, and facilitated the 'conscience clause' in conscription legislation and administration. However, for members in France and Belgium the decision to exempt all existing FAU personnel from conscription was deeply troubling and caused a great deal of upheaval. My article considers four members of the Unit, Quaker and non-Quaker, old hands and new recruits, to demonstrate the impact of the decisions and compromises around conscription and the crossroads it marked for absolutist COs leaving and the fresh injection of men with anti-war beliefs.

In her article, Siân Roberts also considers a case study, in this instance to discuss the involvement of Quaker women in transnational relief. Using the figure of Florence Barrow, one of a circle of influential and active women based in Birmingham in the English Midlands, Roberts argues that the Quaker relief work of the First World War era should be re-contextualised. She explores what she terms 'the making of world citizens' through 'genealogies of activism': women

learned skills and mechanisms from relatives and associates and from former antislavery work, international aid and the many (often connected) British-centred movements for everything from housing reform to peace. The Friends' Emergency Committee and the Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee activities of Barrow and others in France, Belgium, Russia, Poland and elsewhere that addressed the fallout from the war between 1914 and 1924, bear the hallmarks of this learning. The women's actions and personal archives have in turn transmitted their learning to others ever since—and to those who read Roberts' article too.

This same pondering around the role of history in understanding the nature and essence of Quaker faith and action is present in the original pieces drawn from the round table discussions at the 2015 American Academy of Religion conference about H. Larry Ingle's recently published book, *Nixon's First Cover-Up: the religious life of a Quaker president*. The reflections of the readers—Isaac Barnes May, Stephen W. Angell, Jane E. Calvert and Emma Lapsansky-Warner—and the right to reply by the author sit comfortably in this special issue, which some might find surprising. Primarily, these reflections engage deeply with reappraisal, not only by and of Ingle's study, but also of the way Quaker history is 'done', and as such are an important and necessary read. Moreover, the same tensions as can be observed in British Quakerism and Quaker organisations prior to and during the 1914/18 conflict can be discerned in American discussions about Nixon in the Vietnam era; involvement in war could lead to disquiet and denunciation, and threatened meeting membership. Furthermore, the placement of the round table reflections immediately after the First World War articles makes absolute sense: the two eras were bridged by Herbert Hoover, a US mining magnate whose involvement in philanthropy and humanitarianism during and after the war years (including the American Friends Service Committee's work in Europe alongside the Friends' Emergency and War Victims' Relief activities) paved the way towards public life, presidency and on, to mentoring Richard Nixon.

The round table reflections of the readers find both the importance of Ingle's consideration of Nixon's Quaker faith and the issue that Ingle played down the amount of support Nixon enjoyed from his own meeting and from many Friends elsewhere. Indeed, directives may have come from centralised control and from tradition, but local pragmatism—meetings refusing to accept resignations from men who had joined up in 1914/18 or refusing to expel the controversial US politician—as well as the emphasis on the individual relationship to the Divine, enabled the faith to breathe, even if conscription was a touch paper for anguished self-reflection. This special issue as a whole is a forceful reminder that Quakerism carries with it the heavy baggage of persecution, unity and Quietism, which has to some extent crushed the reality of how vibrant Quaker lives have been in communities and in the world. While they may well have been speaking truth to power, Friends have also been entrenched in it, especially during the twentieth century.

The themes found in this special issue also seep into the Reviews section,

as it features texts on: abolition and design in colonial America; early Friends' thoughts and writings; the spread of ideas across national boundaries; biographies of Quakers and their teachings; and a text from the Friends Association for Higher Education series reflecting on the discipline of philosophy and Quakers' place within discussions about truth. The 1914/18 conflict is also a key feature of the section; with the reviews of the newly extended editions of David Boulton's and Cyril Pearce's seminal texts on conscientious objection to mark the centenary, the perpetual layering of reflection and reappraisal is writ large. Furthermore, the review essay (of texts drawn from first-hand accounts of women aid workers connected to Quaker civilian relief projects of the First World and Spanish Civil Wars) suggests the development of humanitarianism through learning from previous experiences.

So what we have in this special issue are the beginnings of a toolkit for how to 'do' Quaker history now; the breadcrumbs may be followed throughout the subsequent pages. For my part, I would like to add that from the contents it will be obvious to every reader that historians of Friends and Quakerism are grappling with exactly the same issues as may be found elsewhere in contemporary Higher Education, especially the Humanities. As Benezet did, academics and others might select a language and tone that matches the time and collapses divisions (imagined or otherwise) in communicating to Friends and non-Friends if they want their words to move people—though there are now a wider range of transmission techniques, which offer the possibility of more careful tailoring and a greater reach. Scholars should also unabashedly recognise that what is said about the past *can* and *does* change hearts and actions, does have 'impact' beyond metrics. I would also argue that the strident political approach offered by social history in the 1960s, 70s and 80s has simply changed to fit with the times. Carefully structured public engagement and patient co-production that have as their *raison d'être* community service may now answer the same aims (though perhaps demand more time). This will no doubt change in future. History, like Quakerism, is vivid, breathing and responsive. For the wider Quaker community, focusing on the richness of Friends' quandaries and decisions of the past, can offer material that might contribute to both personal discernment and corporate development; an obvious point, perhaps, but one that too often gets lost—the shifting methods of history practitioners might yet be employed to harness potential. For those active in Quaker studies, scholars might be encouraged to work to ensure that Friends' experiences are embedded in other histories and the wider historiography, not only to help populate the past in all its diversity, but also to demonstrate how Friends shaped it—and how it has shaped today's Quaker faith.

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