

Editorial

This is a significant issue of the journal. It is the last issue that will be subscription-only. While we have had the facility for subscribers to see the journal online and to access past issues, the new relationship with the Open Library of Humanities means that the journal will be freely available online. Only those requiring a print copy will continue to need to subscribe. We are pleased that we have been able to maintain individual subscription rates and vastly reduce institutional subscription rates in the process. It also means that the journal becomes 'Gold Access' in terms of contributor material being immediately available, without any cost to the author.

The breaking of the link between subscriptions and journal readership means that membership of the Quaker Studies Research Association can no longer be wholly tied to subscriptions and those wishing to stay part of the Association without subscribing to the journal should email your contact details to me at b.p.dandelion@bham.ac.uk.

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This has been a significant year, too, in the passing of four key Quaker studies scholars. Arthur Roberts, John Oliver, Thomas ('Tom') Kennedy and John Punshon have all died in the last 12 months, Tom just following publication of an article in this journal. We are fortunate to have their work as an ongoing legacy of their scholarship, and we also have decided to dedicate this issue of the journal to the memory of John Punshon.

John was born on 18 April 1935 in Hackney to Arthur and Dorothy Punshon. He was educated at Leyton County High School, but, aged 14, he was completely paralysed by polio, an event his wife Veronica claims affected his whole approach to life. He gradually recovered in what was described as a heroic and cheerful manner, and aged 16 was awarded the Cornwell Certificate for high character, courage and endurance by the Scouts.

King Scout's courage

Fifteen-year-old John Punshon, of 47 Essex Road, Leyton, did not imagine when he joined the Scouts movement nearly five years ago that he would become a King's Scout within a few years.

A Patrol Leader in the 16th Leyton Group, John was presented with the valued Cornwell Certificate at the annual meeting of the Boy Scouts' Association at the Town Hall, Leyton.

Two years ago he had a severe attack of infantile paralysis and for some time, except for a slight movement of the head, he lay completely paralysed. Later, when he could still not sit up, and had only the use of his fingers, he passed his Artist's Badge.

Courage and determination

The hospital staff were amazed at his wonderful spirit, courage and determination to get well. Gradually, he recovered and on the day he left hospital, although only able to walk with difficulty, he persuaded his father to take him along to a Scout Troop meeting.

Newspaper articles relating to the award of the Cornwell Certificate for high character, courage and endurance by the Scouts, and a campaign leaflet from the 1964 General Election as a Labour candidate.

GUARDIAN, FRIDAY, MAY 11th, 1951

HEROISM OF A LEYTON SCOUT

PROUD recipient of the Cornwell Certificate, 16 year-old Troop Leader John Punshon, of the 16th Leyton (St. Catherine's) Group, was given an enthusiastic ovation at the annual meeting of Leyton Boy Scouts' Association when he was handed this award by Capt. J. E. Crampton, District Commissioner.

John resides at 47, Essex-road, Leyton, and is the first Scout in the borough to receive the Cornwell Certificate.

A pupil at the County High School for Boys, he joined the 16th Leyton Group three years ago. In November, 1949, he was a victim of infantile paralysis and spent six months in Whipps Cross Hospital. He is now making a good recovery.

Here is what Capt. Crampton said of him when he presented the certificate:

"This award is granted in recognition of his high standard of character and devotion to duty. I am full of admiration for this lad, who has shown himself to be possessed of tremendous fortitude, will-power and determination.

TRUE SCOUT SPIRIT

"He had been in the Troop just over a year, when he was taken ill, and spent quite a long time in hospital, where he suffered, not only in an extremely heroic manner, but also exceeding cheerfully. He managed to gain his Artist's Badge while still bedridden and not even able to sit up properly.

The hospital staff were very much impressed by his courage, cheerfulness, and determination to make a complete recovery. In all, he showed the true Scout spirit and, since his return from hospital, he has resumed active scouting and completed his First-Class tests and continued in his keenness and fighting spirit."

Capt. Crampton said he was very proud to present that certificate and to convey to John the congratulations of the Chief Scout, coupled with those of the County Commissioner, his own and the whole Leyton Association.

Parliamentary General Election 1964
ILFORD NORTH CONSTITUENCY



Oxford philosophy graduate JOHN PUNSHON, 29, was six years a Leyton councillor.

A teacher, he has worked in journalism successively with Labour Party Head Office and with the Trades Union Congress. Son of a builder, he adds housing and town planning to his specialist knowledge of education.

Member of Labour's Eastern Regional Council and former chairman of Essex Young Socialists, he fills in rare leisure time with writing, travelling and jazz.

vote **PUNSHON** vote

John's father was a builder and he maintained a keen interest in housing and housing policy, becoming very involved in the Young Socialists and the Labour Party. Having read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Brasenose, Oxford, graduating in 1957, he worked as a Research Assistant in the Labour Party Head Office, then at the Trades Union Congress. Having served on Leyton Council, in 1964 and 1966 John stood in Ilford as a parliamentary candidate for the Labour Party. He wrote later that he was fortunate in not being elected!

In 1961 he took up a teaching post at Stratford Grammar School, where he worked until 1967. Between 1967 and 1976 he worked in the legal profession, after which he returned to teaching as the Head of Social Studies at Corpus Christi High School. Then, in 1979, having been involved with Quakers since his time at Oxford (John and Veronica were married at Wanstead Meeting House in 1962), John was appointed Quaker Studies Tutor at Woodbrooke, a post he held until 1990. In that year he presented the Swarthmore Lecture to London Yearly Meeting, one of many significant presentations he was to make to a variety of Quaker gatherings during that decade. This included being a keynote speaker at the World Conference of Friends at Chavakali, Kenya. John was visiting professor at George Fox University in 1990 and in 1991 was appointed as the Geraldine Leatherock Professor of Quaker Studies at the Earlham School of Religion in Richmond, Indiana, where he stayed until his retirement in 2001. Shortly afterwards he returned to Britain and settled in Milton Keynes (MK), where he could be closer to his children and grandchildren.

John wrote two Pendle Hill Pamphlets, 'Alternative Christianity' and 'Letter to a Universalist', the longer published version of his Swarthmore Lecture *Testimony and Tradition* (1990), as well as three other major books, *Portrait in Grey: a short history of the Quakers* (Quaker Home Service, 1984), *Encounter with Silence* (Quaker Home Service and Friends United Meeting, 1987) and *Reasons for Hope: the faith and future of the Friends Church* (Friends United Press, 2001).

John wrote of himself:

He was a jazz fan, a season ticket at MK Dons, and a regular at Blackberry Gym. He liked garden centres and tool shops. He knew a lot about 19th century sailing ships and was building a brig and a barque from scratch. His greatest pleasure was the countryside and was always teased about his love for 'vistas'. His favourite music, books and food varied weekly. His family was the most important thing in his life. He was politically incorrect.

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Our own recollections and reflections follow.

I, Ben, first met John Punshon in 1987. John had come to speak at a gathering of Friends at Woodbrooke and I wrote to him afterwards to complain at some phrasing of his that had offended my politically correct youthful zeal.

After a time, a most gracious response came back, totally ignoring my complaint but instead reaching out a hand of friendship and mentorship. He wrote that we were similar kinds of people, a claim I came to hold more and more dear over the years. In the next years, as I completed my PhD, John was always supportive and a wonderful 'companion along the way'. It was a sad day for Woodbrooke when John, as I put it, 'sought asylum in Indiana'. His volumes *Portrait in Grey*, *Encounter with Silence* and the 1990 Swarthmore Lecture *Testimony and Tradition* had critiqued but failed to halt the slide away from Christianity that British Friends were engaged in, and his 'Letter to a Humanist' brought home the increasing unease John must have felt, particularly in a job where he needed to remain relatively impartial.

In 1995, before I took over his old role as Quaker Studies Tutor at Woodbrooke, I visited John and Veronica in Richmond, Indiana. I was touring the Quaker colleges to learn more about different educational approaches and initiatives. John, typically generous, hosted me, arranged for me to meet key Friends in the Richmond area and drew me into his everyday life. I remember seeing the two video players he owned, one to watch US tapes and the other for the British tapes of his beloved West Ham Football Club, which he had sent over. He told me that he had managed to get West Ham into the index of every book he had written! We went shopping together, a rather strange pair of Englishmen of different heights and styles, John in his wellingtons and Homburg and me bedecked with earrings. John told me all about where to eat in Richmond. On Sunday he took two other English Friends and me to Moorland Friends Church to introduce us to programmed Quakerism. Moorland, he judged, was at the edge of what he thought we could take: a five-piece electric band and pastor with a clip-on mike moving between keyboard and congregation. It was a wonderful meeting and so generous. We were given loaves of bread ('bread of life') as first timers and invited to the pastor's house for lunch. Instead, John took us to Carver's just by First Friends in Richmond, ever famous in my mind for its 12-egg omelette.

In 1996 the book of my thesis came out and John became its (and my) greatest advocate. For years afterwards people came on my courses or greeted me at gatherings because of a recommendation John had given them. In 1997 John invited me to the final of the Quaker Hill consultations, this one on the future of Friends. My research had outlined the shift of Liberal Quakerism into a post-Christianity and had argued that behaviour or form rather than belief now held this branch of Quakerism together. I think John liked not only the scholarship but that its conclusions somehow validated his emigration to theologically warmer climes. I believe, too, that John liked America because of its lack of the fixed class hierarchies which beset Britain and because, as I have found, people argue explicitly rather than in cryptic and subtle ways. This was

very much John. He took people as they were, not as they deigned to be taken, and he argued openly and joyfully. He was the epitome of someone who listened with curiosity rather than judgment, but this may sometimes have led to a certain naivety amidst the culture wars of the United States. At the 1997 consultation John had arranged for Gayle Beebe to present his view on Evangelical Quakerism and for myself, Claudia Wair and Alastair Heron to present reflections on the Liberal tradition. After Gayle had presented a forthright and very positive account of the programmed tradition, many unprogrammed Friends were expecting a strong rejoinder. However, Alastair, Claudia and myself all had critical comments to make on the present nature of Liberal Quakerism. The result was that many Liberal Friends there felt betrayed and marginalised and instead of the session ending with a solid discussion we entered a prolonged period of worship at the audience's request that comprised of ministries which included the likes of 'That Ben Pink Dandelion, he's nuts.' John, I think, had misread the politics and the emotional sensibilities of such a conversation. However, I think that moment also reinforced for me the sense of great optimism and joy in the human condition that John conveyed to all he met. He *did* understand that it might be better to present me as 'Ben Dandelion', rather than flag my legal first name, 'Pink' (so that one person there told me how much they had enjoyed my wife's book!) but he was not a war-like character and did not, to his credit, understand the signs of war. He was a thorough Quaker. He was passionate about justice and about academic integrity. This guided him in the classroom and in all of his ministry.

His teaching style was, as one student called it, 'punchy': often provocative, sometimes outrageous, in order to make the point he wished to convey, to help people to think outside of the box, to see the bigger picture. It was also hugely human, often drawing on personal stories of his or of people in his class, making connections with compassion and insight. Humour and storytelling were never far away. John, too, was always self-effacing.

In 1998 John agreed to write the Foreword to *Heaven on Earth: Quakers and the second coming*, by Timothy Peat, Doug Gwyn and myself, even though he disagreed with its basic thesis, a point he elaborated on in his own 2001 *Reasons for Hope*. Later he would email me to say that he had after all become convinced that early Quaker theology *could* and should be understood as eschatological.

In 2006 I organised a roundtable on the theme 'The Truth about Quaker History' and set John up against Carole Spencer, who had just completed her book on understanding Quaker history in terms of holiness theology, and Doug Gwyn, with his apocalyptic framework. I had expected to be holding a role akin to a cross between a television anchor and a boxing referee as the three scholars debated the finer points of the first and second periods of Quaker history. Instead they all agreed to disagree! Indeed, Carole's book would become John's new 'top pick'. He told me 'I liked your book, but Carole's is great!'

In 2008 John gave one of the keynotes at the first conference of the Friends Association for Higher Education to be held at Woodbrooke. Most of the audience

were American, many of whom he had met as his travels had taken him across and through the different branches of Quakerism in the USA. He made the personal connections, and spoke with his usual eloquence, erudition and modesty.

At other times after he returned to England, John would quietly come to Woodbrooke and I might see him eating at the back of the dining room, to be greeted by those who knew him. No fanfare, no fuss.

John once told me that he was not really a scholar but rather ‘a high class journalist’. He was certainly not just a scholar. He had a vocation of teaching but also of finding out the truth of a matter, of holding scholarship to the same level of integrity he sought in the world. His teaching was run through with his faith and from that a desire for justice and social justice. Time will, I believe, judge his work as key contributions in Quaker studies and, without his path-laying work, the academic study of Quakerism may not have reached the point it has today. It is only fitting that we dedicate this issue of *Quaker Studies* to his memory with our gratitude.

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When John Punshon first came to Earlham in Richmond, Indiana, in 1982, I, Steve, was a Master’s Degree student working on my thesis on the subject of William Penn’s views on ‘Truth’ and religious toleration. John was a delight to talk to from the start: very encouraging and collegial, a wonderful conversation partner and a lecturer who definitely held his Earlham School of Religion (ESR) audience with his humour, charm, intelligence, quick wit and deep knowledge of all things Quaker and English. I would not see John again for almost two decades, until after I agreed to take over his role as Professor of Quaker Studies at ESR in 2001. Over the next 15 years I saw him quite a number of times. His presentation at the Friends General Conference Gathering in 2002, in Normal, Illinois, as both an evening plenary speaker and a conversant with dozens at open tea-times, was absolutely splendid. He sold many copies of his latest book, *Reasons for Hope*, a detailed examination of the tenets of Evangelical Quakers. Hopefully, the liberal FGC Friends who bought this book also read it, because American Friends often know much too little about those Quakers who belong to a different branch of Quakerism than they do. Our conversations covered what, for John, was the usual range of topics. I admired his Wallace and Gromit clock. I was edified by his explanation of the names of English pubs during the ESR faculty tour of England. We shared an enjoyment of Cincinnati Reds baseball. And, yes, we talked about the plight of his beloved Quakerism in the American Midwest. He transferred his membership to the First Friends Church in Richmond, Indiana, when he taught at ESR, and he kept it there, even after his retirement when he moved back to England. The American Midwest had found a place in John’s soul.

I would like to return to the almost two-decade period in which John and I did not meet, from 1982 to 2001. We were collaborators on one project during

that time, the festschrift for Hugh Barbour edited by Michael Birkel and John Newman, *The Lamb's War* (Earlham College Press, 1992). John's essay was a typically brilliant examination of the English Quaker firm and is reprinted in this issue of *Quaker Studies*. Mine was on Penn.

For most of this time I lived in the American South (Nashville, Tennessee and Tallahassee, Florida), a region of the United States that John never visited. Still, John Punshon had a great impact on Quakers in the American South, and that was because we read his books. So, I'd like to address the subject of what it was like to know John primarily, or, for some, exclusively, through his books.

Reading John's books was a refreshing and enlivening experience. I was living in Nashville when his *Portrait in Grey* first came out. I helped to organise a book group in the Nashville Friends Meeting to read John's book. It is difficult to express how much excitement his book caused among Nashville Quakers. The general history books on Quakerism that were available before John's book was published were quite dry. John's book was very enlivening. His personal charm and wit communicate well on the written page.

Portrait in Grey started with something that looks very much like a prose poem on the English, concluding with the sentiment that Quakers 'were originally as English as a wet summer Sunday, and it is in England that any telling of the story must begin' (5). John had a gift for contextualising early Quaker history in its English surroundings that no other American Quaker had seen before. Of George Fox John wrote, 'a contemporary of Cromwell, Milton, Bunyan, Wren and Newton, he belonged to a heroic age'. Fox's birthplace of Fenny Drayton was no rural backwater, but located on an old Roman road that was then crucial in the English conquest of Ireland (41). American Quakers are likely to know that Fox had a vision of a great people to be gathered atop of Pendle Hill, but John talks about an immediately preceding event, a 1613 hanging of ten witches at the village of Pendle, that might help to explain in part why Fox also had a vision of an ocean of light overflowing an ocean of darkness (53).

In the later portion of his book John was clearly fascinated by evangelical Christianity, especially in its Quaker form, that arose in the nineteenth century. He praised it as a justifiable protest against the 'complacency, formality and rationalism that was too often the spiritual diet of the day', and saw it in most respects as congruent with the early Quaker experience. At the time he wrote *Portrait in Grey* John did not yet identify himself with evangelical Quakerism, but his attraction to this branch of Quakerism deepened over time, and, as alluded to above, his final book, *Reasons for Hope*, was a detailed and sympathetic exploration of the principles of evangelical Quakerism, this time from an insider's perspective. His writing on theology is penetrating and thought-provoking, worth sitting with in contemplation. *Reasons for Hope* filled a notable gap in Quaker literature, and I still use it in my ESR classes today.

So, when I think of John Punshon, I think especially of the joy and great insight that reading his books has given to me and to many of my friends. Fortunately

for us all, this part of John's witness lives after him. Let us all continue to honour John's memory by reading and re-reading his fine books.

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We begin this commemorative issue with The 2017 George Richardson Lecture, delivered by Christine Trevett to an enrapt audience at Woodbrooke in June. It concerns the notion of 'idiocy' in the seventeenth century and the attempt by Quaker sisters in seventeenth-century Wales to claim that their brother was an 'idiot' and thus was not legally fit to agree to a marriage that would have seen their family lands pass to a rival dynasty. In a wonderful piece of forensic history, Christine systematically unfolds the story and the evidence available to interpret what was going on. John Punshon would have been enthralled.

We then have a further four articles. The first is a reprint of 'The English Firm', written, as mentioned above, by John in a *festchrift* to Hugh Barbour and one of his finest articles, perhaps somewhat overlooked previously. A piece by Michael Birkel takes up a challenge laid down by John many years ago to look at the relationship between George Fox and Augustine of Hippo. Stuart Masters reviews John's major publications looking for key themes and tropes over 20 years of published work. Paul Anderson offers an overview of John Punshon's faith.

These articles are followed by a series of recollections from Chris Lawson, April Claggett, Alan Kolp, Jay Marshall, Paul Buckley and Douglas Gwyn—colleagues and students of John from his time at Woodbrooke and then in the USA.

The issue ends as usual with a selection of book reviews, so ably commissioned, compiled and edited by Rebecca Wynter.

*'Ben' Pink Dandelion, CRQS at Woodbrooke,
and Stephen W. Angell, ESR*



In memory
John Punshon 1935–2017