

# The End of the Affair?

## Examining the Relationship between Quakers and Jews in Britain at the Start of the Twenty-first Century

Tony Stoller

Visiting Professor, Bournemouth University

### Abstract

A particularly close relationship had been generally understood to exist between the Quaker and Jewish communities in Britain as a consequence of the relief work undertaken by Quakers in Germany during the Holocaust and through initiatives such as the *Kindertransport*. That closeness continued until around the end of the twentieth century. However, triggered by domestic debates over Israel/Palestine, it shifted from a positive to an at times antagonistic relationship. This paper argues that, whatever the proximate cause, current tensions actually arise from the ending of the super-equivalent treatment of Jews by Quakers, and a growing existential concern among the British Jewish communities about the return and rise of anti-Semitism. It concludes that the previous close relationship is unlikely to be re-established.

### Keywords

Quakers in Britain, Jews in Britain, Holocaust, Israel/Palestine, anti-Semitism

### Introduction

This article examines the current relationship between the Jewish and Quaker communities in the UK. This topic is significant for corporate activity and individual members of the Religious Society of Friends, as they are drawn increasingly to examine aspects of diversity within the Society. It also has broader relevance within the UK polity as a whole, where issues of anti-Semitism have gained an unwelcome high salience towards the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, reflecting growing levels of anti-Semitism in Western Europe as a whole and the responses to that, especially at a political level.

In this article, I reflect first on the relationship existing through the twentieth century as the *status quo ante*. I then discuss the nature of what I argue are quite widely acknowledged current problems and consider the evidence around those, including individual issues and outbreaks of concern, before going on to address the underlying causes of dissension. I posit the defining influence of two tropes: the previous super-equivalence in the approach of Quakers towards British and European Jewry; and the atavistic attitude of diaspora Jews to the existence of the state of Israel. In conclusion, I offer an assessment of the present state of the relationship between the Quaker and Jewish communities in Britain.

My approach is informed by my personal circumstances. As a Quaker, I am a member of Hampshire and Islands Area Meeting; as a Jew, I am a member of the South Hampshire Reform Jewish community. I need therefore to acknowledge my own rather convoluted subjectivity while seeking to complete an objective analysis. I have also edited the *Friends Quarterly* for the past ten years, and have therefore been responsible for publishing and commissioning some of the articles referred to in this paper.

### Sources and Methodology

My main primary sources have been twofold: interviews with members of each community, both those who represent the corporate aspects and concerned individuals; and contemporary journalism. One would not normally treat journalism as a primary source, but it is appropriate to do so in this instance, where it not only reports incidents and views but also—whether deliberately or not—plays a part in provoking discussion and, as I discuss below, may also be an actor and an agent in the process as a whole. Regarding original interviews, I wish to express my thanks to those who agreed to be interviewed for their generous responses.

Journalistic source material is available in the two archetypal weekly journals, the *Jewish Chronicle* and *The Friend*. However, both need to be approached with caution. The Marcus Sieff Professor of the History of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations at the University of Southampton, Tony Kushner, has observed that, although:

the *Jewish Chronicle* claims to be the voice of Jews in Britain, inevitably given the size and diversity of British Jewry this needs to be qualified, even when its editorial line has attempted to be as inclusive as possible. But as with any longstanding newspaper, there have been times where the specific politics and concerns of the editors and his (and it has always been his) senior contributors have reflected a particular line. This is certainly true of the current situation where Stephen Pollard, a right wing former leader writer on the *Daily Express*, has taken it into the depths of paranoia about antisemitism and left-bashing.<sup>1</sup>

Material from *The Friend* needs to be treated with equal caution, since the diversity of Quaker opinion makes it difficult to derive a collective position from

1 Personal communication from Tony Kushner 14 November 2017.

individual expressions, although there is no evidence that any editorial agenda exists, nor do I judge it is likely to do so. Similar caveats apply to the *Friends Quarterly*. Nevertheless, these are the best written primary sources which we have, and their very unreliability is also a signifier.

Secondary sources are a few previously published books about the earlier years, notably Brenda Bailey's account of the work of Corder Catchpool in Germany in the 1930s, which is discussed in more detail below, and some parallel material about attitudes to and among contemporary diaspora. It is striking, and possibly significant, that there has been so little scholarship published on this topic. For comparative purposes, there is academic discussion in Brian Klug's journal article 'Springtime in Chicago: a pattern of politics and prejudice' of anti-Semitic comments by the Mayor of Chicago, triggered by tension between the black and Jewish communities in that city,<sup>2</sup> but there is nothing comparable in Britain. A select bibliography is attached as an annex to this paper.

Terminology in referring to the two faiths is not entirely straightforward. There is no one single Jewish community in the UK, and the approach of the orthodox communities, on the one hand, and the reform/liberal/progressive communities, on the other, frequently varies. Similarly, although not expressed in nationwide institutional arrangements, Quakerism is in no sense monolithic; not only do individual Meetings populate a wide spectrum from conservative to liberal, but their adherents are notably diverse in their views and approach to faith and religious practice, as well as to the wider political world. The Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting in May 2018 notes that, 'viewed from a distance, our Quaker community may seem like a single body. Up close, it sparkles in its infinite variety. Diversity in our beliefs and language is a richness, not a flaw.'<sup>3</sup> This paper will therefore refer to Jewish and Quaker 'communities', to reflect the diversity among the adherents of both faiths and their different experiences and attitudes.

### Establishing the *Status Quo Ante*

So where should we begin? Not, I judge, as far back as the seventeenth century. Some discourse has intimated that Margaret Fell's intervention in the time of Oliver Cromwell was an important factor in the readmission of Jews to England during the Protectorate, but that seems a rather heroic assumption.<sup>4</sup> As Simon Schama demonstrates, there was a 'fascination' with the Jews among the new English ruling elite at that time, and their readmission was negotiated by leaders

2 Klug, B., 'Springtime in Chicago: a pattern of politics and prejudice', in *Patterns of Prejudice* 22/3 (1988), pp. 36–46.

3 The Epistle is the document that encapsulates the discernment of the Yearly Meeting, which is the annual coming together of Quakers in Britain.

4 Masters, S., 'Abraham's offspring', *Friends Quarterly* 4 (2015), p. 28.

of the Jewish community in the Netherlands, taking place gradually from 1656 to 1657 onwards.<sup>5</sup> Schama writes of the similarity between Jewish and Quaker visions at that time, citing James Nayler's self-proclamation that he was the Jewish Messiah-King (while riding a donkey into Bristol in October 1656). Any closeness of theological vision between the Jewish Kabbalists and Quaker mystics in the seventeenth century is barely recognisable within the currency of practical relations by the twentieth century.

Relations even at that earlier time were not without their own complexities. Stuart Masters has written of George Fox's concern over the extent to which Jews at that time were or were not included within the 'new covenant', and the extent to which Margaret Fell's intervention in the time of Oliver Cromwell was 'an expression of her apocalyptic vision'.<sup>6</sup> Sally Bruyneel notes Quaker belief then that 'a Biblical pre-requisite for Christ's return [was] the conversion of the Jews'<sup>7</sup> (a view still held among fundamentalist Christian self-styled 'friends of the Jews').

For the purposes of this article, the starting point in establishing the nature of the relationship between Quaker and Jewish communities in Britain which applied towards the end of the twentieth century, the *status quo ante*, was the remarkable work of Quakers in Germany before and during the period of Holocaust, and in shattered Europe and Britain in its aftermath. That created a unique bond between members of the two faiths that went far beyond what Quakers had ever extended to other faiths. British Quakers welcomed refugees before and after the war, enabled the arrival of Jewish orphans in the iconic *Kindertransport* and took displaced Jews into their homes and into their hearts—as Joan Darbyshire's account, discussed below, illustrates so well. Rabbi Brant Rosen, who now works for the American Friends Service Committee, expressed an archetypical belief among both British and American Jews as follows:

Of course this connection is more than merely anecdotal; there are in fact important historical affinities between Quakers and Jews. During the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, our respective communities have been proportionally well represented in progressive movements of social change ... . Our faith communities are also historically linked by the heroic efforts of Quakers and the AFSC to help save thousands of European Jews during the Holocaust and to provide relief for scores of Jewish refugees in the war's aftermath.<sup>8</sup>

As a consequence, I judge that the Jewish communities felt and were entitled to feel that this went beyond normal compassion.

5 Schama, S., *Belonging: the story of the Jews, 1492–1900*, London: Bodley Head, 2017, p. 217.

6 Masters, 'Abraham's offspring', p. 14.

7 Bruyneel, S., 'Early Quaker beliefs and the nation of the Jews', *Friends Quarterly* 4 (2015), p. 26.

8 American Friends Service Committee blog post 28 January 2015. Available at <<https://rabbibrant.com/2015/01/28/a-rabbi-at-afsc-quaker-and-jewish-connections-part-1/>> [accessed 29/09/18].

The work of Corder Catchpool, living in the Third Reich and negotiating with the Nazi authorities, shows the lengths to which Quakers were prepared to go—and the risks they were prepared to take—to seek to bring some amelioration for the Jewish communities in Germany. In Bailey's words, Catchpool was determined 'to pour out his sympathy and ingenuity to help victims of this ruthless power', while at the same time 'he had to care for a wife and a family of young children ... sharing the risks he ran'.<sup>9</sup> Letters sent in the 1930s by Rufus Jones, the Chairman of the American Friends Service Committee, 'make it clear that he has devoted himself to the rescue of German Jews and other "non-Aryans"'.<sup>10</sup>

As a consequence, I wish to argue that British Jews believed that they enjoyed not just an equivalence of compassion from British Quakers with other faiths, but what I term a 'super-equivalence'—a concept to which this paper will return below, and which offers a key insight into the current situation. Joan Darbyshire has written about how her grandparents, escaping from Berlin in 1939, found themselves stranded in London: 'Quakers came to the rescue. A Quaker family in Buxton took my grandparents into their home ... . London Quakers set up a hostel for Jewish refugees ... '.<sup>11</sup> Her recollection typifies the relationship between members of the two communities at the end of the last century: 'My mother and I used to go to the Council of Christians and Jews and Muslims in the Quaker Meeting House in Hampstead Garden Suburb. She often talked about how Quakers had helped our family, so I think she would have approved of my becoming a Jewish Quaker.'<sup>12</sup>

Unsurprisingly, therefore, there was a closeness and a level of trust between Quaker and Jewish communities in Britain throughout the second half of the last century. It is evidenced by the large number (proportionally) of people of Jewish origin who became Quakers, or entered into close sympathy with Quakers, in the years between 1945 and the end of the century; in Harvey Gilman's phrase, 'how many Quakers come out to having a Jewish grandmother?'<sup>13</sup> Britain Yearly Meeting still receives extensive funding from a number of Jewish donors, although the Recording Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends, Paul Parker, notes that 'there are people who have said "I want to give you money, but I need you to tell me that you are not going to spend this money on your work in the Middle East, because I can't be seen to be associated with that."<sup>14</sup> It was not uncommon for those Jewish refugees who had come to Britain under the auspices of Quakers to become Friends themselves, or for their children to do so, and to regard themselves, in Darbyshire's words, as 'Jewish Quakers'. Even

9 Bailey, B., *A Quaker couple survives Nazi Germany*, York: William Sessions, 1994, p. 83.

10 Zornberg, I., *Jews, Quakers and the Holocaust*, self-published, 2016, p. 87.

11 Darbyshire, J., 'Quakers and my German Jewish family', *Friends Quarterly* 4 (2015), p. 17.

12 Darbyshire, 'Quakers and my German Jewish family', p. 18.

13 Interview with Harvey Gillman 25 October 2017.

14 Interview with Paul Parker 23 October 2017.

today, a loose grouping of ‘Friends with Jewish Connections’ has some 60 adherents.<sup>15</sup>

However, it is important to acknowledge that, as Chana Kotzin demonstrates, there has been some mythologising of the work of Quakers during this period. This is not to say that Quakers were other than active and supportive, but the search for ‘good news’ stories about rescuers—to counter-balance the horrors—has consistently unearthed activities which turn out to be more complex than they may at first have appeared. The work of Quakers in Germany in the 1930s was by no means confined to the Jews who were suffering under growing persecution, and there are legitimate questions to be asked about how far the Quakers involved considered that they were giving Jews special treatment when compared with the others at risk. Kotzin has written extensively about the Quaker response in Britain to Jewish refugees and found it to have been complicated by uncertainty about the focus on ‘non-Aryan Christians’, and whether Jews somehow belonged in that category. Further—in a throwback to the Quaker efforts among Jews in the seventeenth century—conversionism was not absent.<sup>16</sup>

Arguably, a more realistic assessment of 1930s Quaker work in the years after the war would have helped to normalise current attitudes. Nevertheless, the reality and mythology of Quaker work amid the Holocaust have been an established part of recent discourse, and that in turn has served to increase the sense of let-down—even betrayal—when relationships were challenged over Israel/Palestine.

There was a further location for identity between British Quakers and Jews in the middle of the twentieth century. The *kibbutzim* movement, which flourished in particular in the early years after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, embraced and demonstrated social democratic ideals and practices which would have tuned well with Quaker attitudes and aspirations at that time. The number of contemporary Quakers who have spoken to this author about their time visiting and working on the *kibbutzim* in those years bears evidence to another strand in the sympathy between the communities.

### What Brought About Change?

The warm, super-equivalent relationship between Quaker and Jewish communities in Britain began to unravel as the twentieth century came to an end. The proximate cause was the deteriorating situation in East Jerusalem, on the West Bank and in Gaza. There was an internal clash during the late 1990s among Friends over Quaker national membership of the Council of Christians and Jews—an organisation regarded by Palestinian interests as pro-Israeli. A plan

15 Private communication from the *de facto* convenor of the group, Harvey Gillman 26 November 2017.

16 Kotzin, C., ‘Christian responses in Britain to Jewish refugees from Europe, 1933–1939’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Southampton, 2010.

for British Quaker work at the start of 2000, with a key objective to support the economic infrastructure within the emerging Palestinian state, had to be laid aside as the Israeli response to the Second Intifada effectively destroyed that infrastructure.<sup>17</sup>

Marigold Bentley, Quaker Head of Peace Programmes and Faith Relations, observes that the Quaker Middle Eastern programme at the end of the twentieth century had been broadly respected by both sides. The successor programme—started in 2001, a pivotal date—was that of Ecumenical Accompaniment (EAPPI), an initiative of Churches Together, prompted by Jerusalem churches, funded by Christian Aid, and run in the UK by Quakers as an agency. The EAPPI programme—whether fairly or unfairly—quickly came to be regarded by Jewish communities in Britain as an anti-Israeli initiative. Those who went to the region as Ecumenical Accompaniers in the early years spent most of their time with Palestinian families and learned only their point of view, returning to Britain with something of a missionary zeal. That, in turn, upset the balance between Quaker and Jewish communities in this country.

A gradual deterioration in the first decade of the new century, driven in part by concerns over the EAPPI programme described above, was exacerbated in 2011 when Quaker Meeting for Sufferings, the decision-making body within British Quakers, after a process of wide consultation among Quakers, decided to boycott goods produced in the Occupied Territories.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that that decision, and some of the minutes from Area Meetings that fed into it, were considerably influenced by reports from those who had participated in the EAPPI programme. Thus the minute from Stocksfield Local Meeting, which fed into the minute sent by Northumbria Area Meeting to Meeting for Sufferings, notes that ‘we have heard impassioned first-hand accounts of the Palestine/Israel [sic] conflict situation’.<sup>19</sup> A North London Area Meeting minute noted that it had been previous practice to receive regular reports from EAPPI participants, although that had recently been discontinued.<sup>20</sup>

The boycott of settlement products produced a furious reaction from the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the collective body broadly (although not entirely) representative of British Jewry, who expressed their concern that Quakers, ‘who had stood alongside Jews in their darkest time, were now turning against the Jewish community through such a boycott’.<sup>21</sup> Harvey Gillman has noted that—rather to his surprise at the time—he was unable to rebut claims from Jewish activists that Quakers had never before corporately boycotted goods from another

17 Interview with Marigold Bentley, Quaker Head of Peace Programmes and Faith Relations and Secretary to *Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations*, 7 November 2017.

18 Meeting for Sufferings minutes January–May 2011.

19 Meeting for Sufferings paper S/11/06 mc I b.

20 Meeting for Sufferings paper S/11/06 mc i l.

21 Interview with Marigold Bentley 7 November 2017.

country.<sup>22</sup> He recalls: ‘I remember a conversation I had with one woman. She said “you never boycotted the Nazis, never boycotted the communists. Why pick on us when there is everything else?”’<sup>23</sup>

The *Jewish Chronicle* covered the Quaker consideration of a boycott throughout 2011 in the most hostile terms. Perhaps the sharpest article was written by Geoffrey Alderman under the headline ‘How Quakers turn spiteful’.<sup>24</sup> This was one of many such expressions. When, in 2012, a former member of the EAPPI programme asked the Synod of the Church of England to support the boycott,<sup>25</sup> it appeared to the Board of Deputies that—as they saw it—Christian churches including Quakers were lining up against their interests. Discussion at Meeting for Sufferings in 2013 about extending that boycott to Israel as a whole, even though it did not happen, widened the split.<sup>26</sup>

The Recording Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends, Paul Parker, is at pains to stress how closely Quakers continued to work with first liberal and then reform Jewish communities over the issue of same-sex marriage, which was a notable achievement during the current decade, and stresses that such contact continues and usually flourishes.<sup>27</sup> Paradoxically, Marigold Bentley wonders whether the very success of Quakers in lobbying on same-sex marriage might have made British Jewish lobbyists particularly nervous about the impact that Friends might have on the boycott question.<sup>28</sup>

The ill-chosen words continued to appear. Bentley recalls how difficult it was to produce a thoughtful, religious draft minute at Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath in 2014,<sup>29</sup> when ‘Friends were keen to express outrage at the destruction of Gaza by Israel’.<sup>30</sup> *The Friend* carried as its main ‘Thought for the week’ in June 2017 an article which asserted that ‘the historic practice of Jews ... [is] to attempt to conquer and dominate’.<sup>31</sup> This was met with a trenchant

22 This goes against the view that Quakers had boycotted South African goods during the Apartheid era. There was, however, no specific BYM boycott at that time, whatever steps other bodies or individual Quakers may have taken. In a related matter, Quaker Meeting for Sufferings began to discuss withdrawing Yearly Meeting funds from Barclays Bank from 1980 in response to a call to boycott the bank, but eventually decided against that course of action on 1 November 1986 (minute 1).

23 Interview with Harvey Gillman 25 October 2017.

24 Alderman, G., ‘How Quakers turned spiteful’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 April 2011, p. 19.

25 Report of Proceedings, General Synod 2012 November Group of Sessions vol. 43 no. 3, containing a report on the Anglican Consultative Council meeting Monday 19 November 2012.

26 Meeting for Sufferings minutes April 2013.

27 Interview with Paul Parker 23 October 2017.

28 Interview with Marigold Bentley 7 November 2017.

29 One year in three, the annual Meeting of Friends in Britain (see note 3) is widened into a Gathering, which was the case in 2014.

30 Personal communication, 7 November 2017.

31 Parratt, P., ‘What love can do’, *The Friend*, 9 June 2017, p. 3.



response from among many Quakers, especially those with Jewish connections, but although the most extreme example it is by no means the sole instance of a problematic vocabulary.

A report submitted by Devon Area Meeting<sup>32</sup> for consideration by Meeting for Sufferings in August 2017 stated that ‘Zionism is an ideology of Jewish nationalism’.<sup>33</sup> I observe that this type of substitution between the actions of the Israeli state and the views and position of Jews in Britain is deeply sensitive to the Jewish community, who perceive it to be in some circumstances a cover for anti-Semitic utterances. This author has a painful memory of being asked by a British Jew at a recent Passover service: ‘why do Quakers hate us so much?’, bringing into sharp focus the poor state of relations between the communities at this time.

Specific issues have arisen in a number of localities—although, I stress, by no means all. Typically, these occur when speakers who are regarded by the Jewish communities—and, specifically, the Jewish Board of Deputies—as being not just pro-Palestinian but actively hostile to European Jewry are booked for events being held in Quaker Meeting Houses. In their turn, Quaker Meetings can feel bullied when they receive representations from the Board of Deputies—often in very strong terms—that they are permitting premises to be used for the expression of ‘hate speech’. During 2017 there were confrontations of this sort in Cambridge, Brighton, and elsewhere.<sup>34</sup>

The controversy was heightened in 2017 when Robert Cohen—a prominent Jewish pro-Palestinian critic of Israel, and a *bête noire* of many of the Jewish communities—was one of four invited to speak at a special interest group at Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering in Warwick in August 2017.<sup>35</sup> He argued, *inter alia*, that a ‘seamless merger that has taken place over the last 70 years between Judaism and Zionism and modern Jewish identity’ and ‘that most Jews in Britain are still asking themselves, and everyone else, the wrong questions’.<sup>36</sup> It has been said to me that Cohen’s view was at once challenged at that event, but damage had been done, and there followed a good deal of unproductive debate about

32 Area Meetings comprise Quakers from a group of Local Meetings, and are the preferred route for matters of concern to be raised with the national body, Meeting for Sufferings.

33 Devon Area Meeting working group on Palestine and Israel 80/2017 minute to Meeting for Sufferings August 2017. That Area Meeting had previously raised the matter with Sufferings, in January 2013, when it had called for a boycott of all Israeli goods. Meeting for Sufferings papers October 2013.

34 See, for example, Minutes of Jesus Lane Local Meeting, Cambridge, 7 May 2017; and the related report ‘Board halt Israel hate author talk’ in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 May 2017.

35 Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering July/August 2017 *Documents in advance* Events listings p. 38; the names of the speakers are not listed.

36 <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/writingfromtheedge/2017/08/equality-thats-cant-work/>> [accessed 29/11/17].

whether what he had said—and also put on his personal blog<sup>37</sup>—was or was not ‘hate speech’.

Whether it was ‘hate speech’ or not, I argue that it was a new low point in the relationship between the communities. The wider sense of concern felt among both groups, and the seeming confusion of the loyalties of those who spoke or wrote about the issue, was typified by this incident. I am not arguing that it was a deal-breaker in the relationship, but rather that it illustrates how far that relationship had deteriorated, and the reason—or more accurately the pretext—for that deterioration.

### The Centrality of the Israel/Palestine Issue?

It appears *prima facie* to be the Israel/Palestine issue that has brought to an end the previously ‘special relationship’ between the two communities. Even the term ‘Israel/Palestine’, which is in common usage among Quakers, is not neutral; within some of the British Jewish communities the very use of the phrase represents hostile bias. (It is used in this paper *faute de mieux*; other phrases such as ‘Israel and the Occupied Territories’ carry equal if not more baggage.) Almost all antagonistic inter-community discourse—and quite a bit of the soul-searching among the non-confrontational members of those communities—is mediated through the aggressive/defensive Zionism of vocal elements within the UK Jewish community.

The issue is also at the mercy of external events. When the president of the United States, Donald Trump, announced late in 2017 American support for confirmation of Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel the reactions of representatives of each community emphasised how far apart they have become. The announcement was welcomed as ‘unremarkable’ by the president of the Board of Deputies, Jonathan Arkush,<sup>38</sup> but was ‘condemned’ by Recording Clerk Paul Parker on behalf of Quakers in Britain.<sup>39</sup>

### Defining Tropes

So is that what it is all about? I doubt it is as simple as that. I fully acknowledge that the issue of what I will still call Israel/Palestine is the proximate cause of what I term in this article ‘the end of the affair’, but that does not go to the heart of the matter.

37 <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/writingfromtheedge/2017/08/equality-thats-cant-work/>> [accessed 29/11/17].

38 *The Guardian*, 7 December 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/06/trump-to-plunge-middle-east-into-fire-with-no-end-with-jerusalem-speech>> [accessed 9/12/17].

39 6 December 2017 <<https://quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-condemn-us-recognition-of-jerusalem>> [accessed 9/12/17].

I argue, rather, that there are two fundamental tropes that explain why the relationship has been unable to survive the tensions generated in the Middle East, and which also make it implausible that the previously close relationship can be re-established any time soon. The first surrounds the end of what I have described above as a previously 'super-equivalent' relationship; the second concerns the impossibility even for non-Zionist Jews to relinquish the special situation of the continuing existence of a State of Israel.

### *The End of Super-equivalence*

As this paper has demonstrated, Quaker sympathies towards European and British Jews were regarded as having gone beyond the benign tolerance offered to other religious groups. The outstanding relief work in Germany in the 1930s, the *Kindertransport* and related initiatives, and immediate post-war support created a closeness and level of trust between the two communities that was exceptional. That was then enhanced by the closeness of aspirations between the early *kibbutznik* movement, in its social democrat phase, and the political attitudes of post-Second World War Quakers.

The consequence was that the post-war Quaker community judged that it had offered, and the British Jewish community perceived that it had received, not merely an equivalence of treatment but a super-equivalence. That in turn enabled Quakers to be accepted as a critical friend within Britain, speaking at times unpalatable truth to UK Jewish communities, and for a good while to hold the ground between the warring communities in Israel/Palestine. In the years from 1945 until almost the end of the last century the strength of the relationship survived the vicissitudes of occupation, war, the wall, and two intifadas. Indeed, I suggest that within Britain it was perhaps Quakers alone of the broad grouping of Christian-based churches who could speak frankly about Ramallah, Gaza, the Settler movement, and the armed *kibbutzim*. When there is mutual trust, friends can say things to each other that would be unacceptable coming from others. Indeed, they became more than friends: they had become partners in a shared affair.

However, the increasing involvement of Quakers with pro-Palestinian activism and the growing anxiety of British Jews beset by the renewed threat of anti-Semitism, as discussed above, plus, I argue, anti-Jewish feeling latent within comments about the Israeli state and the dogmatic pro-Zionism of groups within British Judaism, has substantially damaged the previous relationship. What is on offer now from Quakers is just an *equivalence* of treatment for the Jewish community with other religious minorities. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that, but the Jewish community had become used to *super-equivalence* from Quakers and would wish to reclaim that if it were ever on offer—which, clearly, it is not.

Representatives of both communities have made it clear to me that even the language of super-equivalence is no longer used. Talking of recent inter-community

tensions over Israel, Rabbi Debbie Young Somers observed that ‘I don’t think the Quakers are unique in that dynamic. The Church of Scotland the Church of England, it happens in lots of different contexts.’<sup>40</sup> Paul Parker observes that ‘Jews argue about things very differently to how Quakers argue about things, and there are different cultural norms at work.’<sup>41</sup> A minute from New England Yearly Meeting in the USA this year records a wish to ‘examine how anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, and privilege affect our understanding of the conflict’.<sup>42</sup> All that is said in good faith, but it represents, consciously or not, the setting aside of any expectation of super-equivalence—and instinctive empathy—in Quaker attitudes towards the Jewish communities.

I judge that the representatives of Judaism in Britain have concluded—correctly—that the best that the British Jewish communities are going to get from Quaker communities in the present context is no worse treatment than other religions will receive. Harvey Gillman provides the perfect encapsulation of the consequence of this realisation: ‘Quakers are no longer in Jewish eyes the Righteous Gentile.’<sup>43</sup> This is, of course, perfectly reasonable viewed objectively, but its denial of the prior super-equivalence is a body-blow after the warmth of relationship throughout the twentieth century. It is that moment at the end of a love affair when the erstwhile partners are left to say to each other: ‘let’s continue to be friends’.

### *British Jews and Israel*

The second trope is even more fundamental, because it has conditioned the Jewish psyche for at least three thousand years and finds its apotheosis in the Shoah, the European Holocaust. Jews are atavistically conditioned to fear for their lives. It is to the great credit of Quakers that in the last century, they understood the psychological and practical refuge offered by simple fact that a state of Israel could exist; that it was an existential icon in the face of an unprecedented level of existential threat.

Simon Schama, in his Balfour Declaration Centenary Lecture on 1 November 2017, drew the line in the sand which virtually all British Jews would acknowledge, whether they consider themselves Zionists or not: ‘Israel ... with its 6 million Jews ... stands as the ultimate retort for the number Adolf Hitler exterminated. The life of Israel is Hitler’s failure.’<sup>44</sup> The difficulty can be expressed in a paradox.

40 Interview with Rabbi Debbie Young Somers 10 October 2017.

41 Interview with Paul Parker 23 October 2017.

42 Minutes of New England Yearly Meeting August 2017 <<https://neym.org/minutes/year/2017-sessions>> [accessed 29/09/18].

43 Interview with Harvey Gillman 25 October 2017. The term ‘righteous among nations’ (הַעֲנֵלִים אֲמוֹת הַסָּדִי, *khasidei umót ha’olám*) often expressed as ‘the righteous gentile’, is a formal honorific established by the Israeli state in 1953 for non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the period of the Holocaust.

44 Schama, S., Balfour centenary anniversary lecture, 1 November 2017. Available at <<http://www.balfour100.com/balfour-centenary-lecture/>> [accessed 2/12/17].

A number of vocal British Jews feel that expressed criticism or disapproval of the actions of the Israeli government and the state of Israel amounts in effect to anti-Semitism. I argue that is a damaging over-reaction. On the other hand, there are clearly many people in Britain who do indeed use criticism of the actions of the Israeli state as a proxy for *actual* anti-Semitism.

A report in the *Jewish Chronicle* about the EAPPI movement illustrates how disputed accounts of atrocities classically enrage those who wish to believe them and awake the paranoia of those who feel they are designed only to mislead and threaten:

It is at this point that Griffiths [a recently returned Ecumenical Accompanier] ... fires up and starts to talk about the 'Jewish lobby', and accuses Israel of planting knives besides the bodies of shot Palestinians. She calls for a full boycott of produce and services from Israel, while arguing that all military aid to the Jewish state should cease. One woman in the audience asks Griffiths why Evangelical Christians are not as sympathetic to the Palestinian plight. For Griffiths, the answer is simple—and is met without challenge from the audience. It is down to the 'Jewish lobby'.<sup>45</sup>

This situation is further complicated by the position pertaining within the contemporary British Labour Party since 2015. British political theorist Alan Johnson has identified what he describes as 'anti-Semitic anti-Zionism', an accusation he levels specifically at the leader of the Labour Party and his immediate supporters.<sup>46</sup> If that seems an extreme assertion, distinguished Anglo-Jewish writers have described as 'derisory' the overall Labour Party's response to 'anti-Semitism under the cloak of so-called anti-Zionism'.<sup>47</sup> Concern among the British Jewish community, and within the wider political commentariat, over anti-Semitism within the Labour Party reached acute levels in the spring of 2018.<sup>48</sup> Whether justified or not, this had the effect of increasing Jewish existential anxiety. It recalls the old joke: 'just because you're paranoid doesn't mean that they're not out to get you.'

The existence of anti-Semitism in Britain is not a new phenomenon. David Kynaston's recent history of the Bank of England notes that during the interwar years 'its recruitment policies were anti-Semitic'.<sup>49</sup> The BBC's official historian, Jean Seaton, has observed that 'the BBC displayed, both before and during

45 Sandy Rashty 27 May 2016. Church group that sends volunteers to the West Bank to 'witness life under occupation' in *Jewish Chronicle*.

46 Quoted in Cohen, R., 'Anti-semitic anti-Zionism', *New York Times*, 18 October 2016, p. A1.

47 *The Times*, 6 November 2017, p. 24.

48 See, for example, *The Times*, 1 April 2018, p. 1 and *passim*, and *Sunday Times*, 2 April 2018, p. 1 and *passim*.

49 Kynaston, D., *Till Time's Last Stand. A history of the Bank of England, 1694–2013*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017; reviewed in *Financial Times*, 2 September 2017, Arts section p. 9.

the war, views and decisions that were quite simply anti-Semitic'.<sup>50</sup> It would be surprising if this residual national characteristic were entirely absent among British Quakers, and might be heightened in the contemporary period.

Reliable recent data do not show an actual increase in anti-Semitism in Britain (although newspaper reports since 1945 have repeatedly said that it was increasing, a possible legacy of the Holocaust and the difficulty of coming to terms with its enormity). A report published by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in September 2017 noted that levels of anti-Semitism have not increased in recent years, and that 'only a small proportion of British adults can be categorised as "hard-core" anti-Semites—approximately 2%'.<sup>51</sup> However, the research also found that 'anti-Semitic ideas can be found at varying degrees of intensity across 30% of British society', leading the report's authors to conclude that this 'goes some way towards explaining why British Jews appeared to be so concerned about anti-Semitism, as the likelihood of encountering an anti-Semitic idea is much higher than that suggested by simple measures of anti-Semitic individuals'.<sup>52</sup>

It is therefore not to be wondered at, given the general climate of anxiety generated within British politics, and in the context of anti-Jewish violence just across the Channel in France, that many in the Jewish communities are intensely apprehensive about the current threat of anti-Semitism in the UK. Yet I perceive that British Quakers appear hard-pressed to accept British Jews' right to use about Israel the words of Martin Luther—'here I stand; I can do no other.'

### Conclusions

What may we conclude has happened to that long-standing affair between Jewish and Quaker communities in Britain? I argue that the closeness and warmth of the relationship between the communities—and a pervasive mythology from the mid century—used to mean that periods of intense Jewish apprehension about the risks of anti-Semitism in Britain were understood by Quakers and soothed rather than roughly dismissed. Equally, Quakers were wise enough to understand that the great majority of Jews in Britain and Europe—whether they deem themselves Zionists or not—cannot in the end do anything other than defend both Israel's continued existence and its significance in the context of European Jewish history, even when they are intensely critical of the actions of the Israeli state. In the twentieth century, Quaker responses and language were conditioned accordingly. Over the past 20 years, however, discourse in some Quaker circles has aggravated rather than alleviated the fears, as once it did.

50 Seaton, J., 'The BBC and the Holocaust', *European Journal of Communications* 2/1 (1987), p. 66.

51 Staetsky, D., *Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain: key findings from the JPR survey of attitudes towards Jews and Israel*, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2017.

52 Staetsky, *Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain*.

The analogy I wish to deploy is that of an intense relationship between two people. When that works at its best, each will extend a level of sympathy and understanding to what they may regard as egregious faults in the other, but which they are prepared to contemplate—with love—in a way that reinforces rather than damages the relationship. I argue that this had been the case for Jews and Quakers through the greater part of the last century, any mythologising notwithstanding. But the two have now fallen out of love and said things in the course of that falling-out which cannot be unsaid.

In his novel *The End of the Affair*, Graham Greene creates a character, Sarah, who finds it impossible to sustain a relationship outside her own faith.<sup>53</sup> In the past, Quakers and Jews were not hindered by that, any more than Sarah was before the bombs began to fall in her war. Now that they have fallen and continue to fall in the twenty-first century, we have to conclude that Quakers and Jews have come to the end of their long affair.

### Select Bibliography

- Bailey, B., *A Quaker couple in Nazi Germany: Leonhard Friedrich survives Buchenwald*. York: William Sessions, 1994.
- Greene, G., *The End of the Affair* (repr.), London: Vintage, Random House, 2012 [1951].
- Klug, B., 'Springtime in Chicago: a pattern of politics and prejudice', *Patterns of Prejudice* 22/3 (1988), pp. 36–46.
- Kotzin, C., 'Christian responses in Britain to Jewish refugees from Europe, 1933–1939', PhD thesis, University of Southampton, 2000.
- Kushner, A., *Journeys from the Abyss: the Holocaust and forced migration from the 1880s to the present*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017.
- Kynaston, D., *Till Time's Last Stand: a history of the Bank of England 1694–2013*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Masters, S., Darbyshire, J., Bruyneel, S. et al., 'Quakerism and Judaism', *Friends Quarterly* 43/4 (2015).
- Schama, S., *Belonging: the story of the Jews, 1492–1900*, London: Bodley Head, 2017.
- Seaton, J., 'The BBC and the Holocaust', *European Journal of Communication* 2/1 (1987), pp. 53–80.
- Staetsky, D., *Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain: key findings from the JPR survey of attitudes towards Jews and Israel*, London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2017.
- Zornberg, I., *Jews, Quakers and the Holocaust; the struggle to save the lives of 20,000 children*. Seemingly self-published; accessed in the library of Woodbrooke Quaker Studies Centre, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Greene, G., *The End of the Affair* (repr.), London: Vintage, Random House, 2012 [1951], p. 178.

### Author Details

Tony Stoller is visiting Professor in the Faculty of Media and Communications at Bournemouth University. He is the author of *Classical music radio in the United Kingdom 1945 to 1995* (Palgrave Macmillan 2017); *Sounds of your life: the history of Independent Radio in the UK* (John Libbey publications 2010); and *Wrestling with the angel* (Quaker books 2001), which accompanied his Swarthmore Lecture that year. He has been the editor of the *Friends Quarterly* since 2008. He is a member of Hampshire and Islands Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, and of the South Hampshire Reform Jewish Community.

Mailing address: Faculty of Media and Communications, Bournemouth University, Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow, Poole, Dorset, BH12 5BB.

Email: [tstoller@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:tstoller@bournemouth.ac.uk)