

Albright & Wilson and Change in the Quaker Business Environment During World War I

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Abstract

This article uses the example of Albright & Wilson, a chemical manufacturing firm based in Birmingham, to highlight the potential impact of war, and World War I specifically, on Quaker businesses. Using principally archival records, it provides some background to the Quaker pacifist debate of the time, as well as to the directorial and managerial structure of the firm. Having provided a thorough analysis of key figures and control in the firm, it argues that, in bringing the pacifist question to a head, as well as in creating commercial difficulties, World War I led to the firm ceasing to be Quaker in any recognisable sense. The examples of Clark, Son & Morland and Baker and Sons are used to suggest that this was a broader trend in Quaker businesses at this time.

Keywords

Albright & Wilson, World War I, archival records, pacifist debate, Clark, Son & Morland, Baker and Sons

Introduction

Over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries many of the most visible Quaker businesses underwent considerable change or decline; some ceased to be Quaker and others merged either with other Quaker firms or, more frequently, with non-Quaker firms.¹ Simultaneously, Quakerism entered

1 For example, in 1912 Crosfields, a chemical manufacturer, merged with Brunner Mond & Co and ceased being Quaker (see Windsor, D. B., *The Quaker Enterprise: Friends in business*, London: Muller, 1980), and in 1919 Frys and Cadbury merged. Many other examples exist, including Allen and Hanburys and Lloyds, and Huntley and Palmers.

a 'renaissance' period, developing its peace testimony in 1912² and moving from a Testimony Against War to the Quaker Peace Testimony by this date.³ By the outbreak of World War I it was strongly committed to peace as a movement.⁴ Most of those with an interest in Quakerism and Quaker studies are aware of Quakers as conscientious objectors during World War I.⁵ However, there were some Quakers who engaged with or assisted in the war effort. These are less frequently the focus of attention. After a literature review and methodology, this article looks briefly at the pre-war context, Quaker reactions to the outbreak of war and its effect on business generally.

World War I represented a seismic shift for British industry broadly, not least for those businesses that could be converted to the manufacture of munitions.⁶ Many Quaker businesses at this time were industrial in nature, and were therefore particularly vulnerable to the changes wrought by World War I. This article covers new ground in exploring the implications of the Peace Testimony specifically, and World War I generally, for change in Quaker businesses during the war period, largely through the lens of Albright & Wilson, a chemical manufacturing firm. Other factors such as generational succession in family firms and changes in company law have been explored elsewhere and no doubt played a part in change and decline in the Quaker business environment.⁷ However, the impact of World War I on Quaker businesses has not been explored previously.

The central purpose of this article is therefore to examine the impact of World War I on decline in Quaker businesses. The case of Albright & Wilson particularly demonstrates the complexities of the commitment to pacifism for Quaker businesses during the war. It brings together analysis of the impact of the Peace Testimony and other changes to suggest that World War I was a key agent of change and decline in the contemporary Quaker business environment. This is important in informing discussions taking place around Quaker business decline partly because it has not been recognised previously but also because it explores a central issue for Quakers and their businesses historically and today: the potential

2 Kennedy, T. C., *British Quakerism 1860–1920: the transformation of a religious community*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 308–09.

3 Bishop, E. and Jung, J., 'Seeking Peace: Quakers respond to war', in Dandelion, P. and Angell, S. W., *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 115.

4 Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920*, pp. 308–09.

5 See, for example, The White Feather Diaries at <http://www.whitefeatherdiaries.org.uk/>.

6 Lloyd-Jones, R. and Lewis, M. J., *Arming the Western Front: war, business and the state in Britain 1900–1920*, London: Routledge, 2016.

7 See, for example, Corley, T. A. B., 'How Quakers Coped with Business Success', in Jeremy, D., *Business and Religion in Britain*, Aldershot: Gower, 1988, and Kavanagh, D. and Brigham, M., 'The Quakers and the Joint Stock Company: uneasy bedfellows', in Burton, N. and Turnbull, R., *Quakers, Business and Corporate Responsibility*, Cham: Springer, 2019.

discord between Quaker ethics and business needs and survival. No research has previously been done into the way in which war triggered such a discord.

Literature Review

In terms of research into industry in World War I, Lloyd-Jones and Lewis provide a helpful overview of governmental organisation of the industrial aspect of preparation for war, but do not provide an individual business case study or make any reference to Albright & Wilson.⁸ I have been unable to find any detailed studies of individual businesses during World War I.

Of those who have written about Quaker pacifism prior to and during World War I, Kennedy gives a thorough analysis of the transformation that took place in Quakerism from the late nineteenth century through to 1920, including the revival of the Peace Testimony and the significance of this for Quaker approaches to World War I.⁹ Brock confirms the importance of pacifism to Quakerism prior to World War I, although he seems to rely on Kennedy for his analysis of the period.¹⁰ Bishop and Jung deal with general shifts in approaches to the Peace Testimony, though they do not analyse these shifts with specific relevance to World War I.¹¹ The White Feather Diaries give valuable insights into the views of individuals with links to Quakerism during the war, but do not touch upon matters of conscience around business activities.¹² Indeed, there has been no research specifically on the ethical dilemmas, which arose due to their Peace Testimony, facing Quaker businesses during World War I.

Albright & Wilson has not previously been studied as a Quaker business specifically. Richard E. Threlfall, the son of Albright & Wilson's key engineer Richard Threlfall, has written an account from the viewpoint of an insider to the business from 1916 onwards.¹³ However, while he notes William Arthur Albright's and Henry Lloyd Wilson's resignations, he does not refer in great detail to the pacifist dilemma or its impact upon the business. Matthews, Boyns and Edwards explore Albright and Wilson's significance in terms of the history of management accounting, and touch upon World War I in this discussion, but again do not refer to the importance of Quakerism for the business.¹⁴

8 Lloyd-Jones and Lewis, *Arming the Western Front*.

9 Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920*.

10 Brock, P., *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660–1914*, York: Sessions Book Trust, 1990, p. 294.

11 Bishop and Jung, 'Seeking Peace: Quakers respond to war'.

12 The White Feather Diaries at <http://www.whitefeatherdiaries.org.uk/>.

13 Threlfall, R. E., *100 Years of Phosphorus Making 1851–1951*, Oldbury, 1951.

14 Matthews, M., Boyns, T. and Edwards, J. R., 'Chandlerian Image or Mirror Image? Managerial and accounting control in the chemical industry: the case of Albright & Wilson, c.1892 to c.1923', *Business History* 45/4 (2003), pp. 24–52, DOI: 10.1080/00076790312331270209.

Methods

This article uses principally primary sources, mostly from the extant collection left by Albright & Wilson at the Wolfson Centre for Archival Research in the Library of Birmingham. It uses a mixed method, though principally qualitative analysis, to assess what happened among Quakers managing or directing businesses at the time of World War I in the context of the Peace Testimony. In choosing a major case study for this article and more extensive work elsewhere I was driven by various factors, some practical. The main ones were that Albright & Wilson has received little focus elsewhere, especially for its interest in terms of Quaker studies, and that the volume of extant information was significant. Generally, I used the catalogue(s) at the relevant archives to determine which boxes of data to consult, and then looked through the box contents personally where possible to determine which items to look at further.

My focus was on items relating to the directorship or management of businesses, as I believed these documents would reveal most about a business's Quaker nature: for example, in the case of Albright & Wilson I mainly used minutes and papers from meetings of the Board of Directors and Management Committee, as well as letters from key members of the business. I initially endeavoured to keep an open mind as to what the documents might reveal in relation to the business and Quakerism, though I was aware from the start that themes such as control of a firm and what war work it did would be important. At the outset of my research I recorded every item present until I became more familiar with the material and could omit items such as annual share certificates from investment in other firms, and used the opening headings of minutes to prioritise my reading. In analysing the data I was looking both to get a general impression of the business's activities to familiarise myself with key people and activities and for any information relating to Quakerism or Quaker principles. For example, I familiarised myself with the key figures in the firm via documents in the archives such as Management Committee minutes and Threlfall's *100 Years of Phosphorus Making 1851–1951*.¹⁵ The more I read, the further my sense of who the key figures were was honed. This approach and my growing familiarity enabled me to prioritise correspondence from and to directors I knew to be influential. In part, my assessment of control within the firm was quantitative, an example being the sheer numerical dominance of reports by the non-Quaker manager Sykes. This dominance was significant in that it highlights dynamics of control within the firm.

The Pre-war Context and Business in Wartime

From around the start of the twentieth century there was increasing debate around peace, socialism and justice in industry and employment among Quakers, with the foundation of groups such as the Friends' Social Union (FSU) and the

15 Threlfall, *100 Years*.

Socialist Quaker Society.¹⁶ The FSU cannot be dismissed as a fringe group of little relevance to business people: both Seebohm Rowntree and George Cadbury served on its central committee, and it had a considerable number of subscribers.¹⁷ Kennedy asserts that this debate was greatly increased by the outbreak of war, and this assertion is confirmed by several contemporary letters in *The Friend*: 'Before we can have peace we must establish justice in our midst. In modern states the people are robbed by the inroads made upon their wages by unjust taxation, and by profiteering employers.'¹⁸ It is also evident in some developments at businesses such as Albright & Wilson, where unions became more active and a Works Committee was established during the war as an attempt to give the employees more of an active say in the running of their areas of the business, and in the founding by Quakers of the War and Social Order Committee in 1915, which was tasked with both considering the link between social order and the outbreak of war and debating alternative forms of social order.¹⁹

Upon the outbreak of war, government control over business was in theory fairly immediate, thanks to the Defence of the Realm Act of August 1914. However, governmental recording of intervention during World War I was poor and slow to begin, particularly when compared with the Second World War (by which point it is possible lessons had been learnt from World War I), so it is hard to ascertain exact details about its progress generally. The Ministry of Munitions, intended to centralise and coordinate industrial production for the war effort, was not even established until May 1915.²⁰ My analysis of Albright & Wilson sheds light on the impact of its establishment. Some other examples of early government interventions and other general effects of the outbreak of war that affected Quakers are apparent in the pages of *The Friend*. For example, in the section entitled 'Current News Among Friends' from 21 August 1914 we find the following information:

A few days' tour in Ulster last week illustrated ways in which Friends are being at once affected by the war. In Bessbrook are the large flax spinning works founded by the late John Grubb Richardson and now carried on by members of his family and others. The cutting off of Continental supplies of the raw material had necessitated the institution of short time at the works for the present. At Richhill a Friend fruit farmer and preserver was feeling the sudden rise in the price of sugar and the probability of serious limitation of supplies. In Belfast a call on the Friend Secretary of the leading steamship company brought home the fact that all its steamers had been requisitioned by the government for war transport purposes,

16 Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920*, pp. 280–85.

17 See both Friends Social Union Minute Book 1907–1915, LSF, and Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920*, p. 280.

18 Letter from John Moyle entitled 'The Roots of War', edition of 4 September 1914, bound volume for 1914, p. 656. Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920*, p. 360.

19 War and the Social Order Committee Minute Book, 1915–1917, LSF.

20 Lloyd-Jones and Lewis, *Arming the Western Front*.

and that the company's business was for the time restricted to the conveyance of goods possible in two small cargo boats which they had chartered.²¹

This short excerpt alone, written barely a fortnight after the declaration of war, picks up several of the key difficulties businesses faced and demonstrates how quickly they took effect. Supplies, prices, and government control are recurring themes. While these would have affected all businesses, the rise in sugar prices would have affected many Quaker businesses, as both confectioner and shopkeeper were common occupations among Quakers. Another writer to *The Friend*, a shopkeeper, highlights the impact on his business:

Shopkeepers have been blamed so much for advancing prices that perhaps the following will explain the position that most of them find themselves suddenly placed in. A grocer before the war was buying sugar at 1 ¾d. per lb. and selling it at 2d., so that if he turned £1000 a year in sugar he made £125. Now sugar has doubled in price, yet he is expected to retail it at the official price of 3¾d., which means that at one slap his profit goes down to £62 10s., with the probability that owing to dearth of employment it will be impossible at the greatly increased price to maintain his turnover of £1000.²²

The Response of Business People

Many prominent Quaker business people were at the forefront of efforts to provide relief in some form or other within a few months of the start of the war. Among these were Joseph Allen Baker, whose firm Baker and Sons provided bread machines for supplying troops, as well as manufacturing shells. He was also president of a group of international church representatives in a conference aimed at securing international peace in Switzerland just as war broke out.²³ Joseph Allen Baker's son Philip (later Philip Noel-Baker), along with his brother Allan Richard, was one of the founders of the Friends' Ambulance Unit.²⁴ Other members of the family issued an appeal for service with the Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund.²⁵ William Arthur Albright was heavily involved with the Friends' War Victims Relief Committee. Roderick and Hilda Clark, of the family of shoemakers, were also very involved with this committee. Like most Quakers, Quaker business people seem to have felt called to act in some way at the outbreak of war. Their business success and wealth meant that they usually had the resources to do so, as well as considerable influence.

21 *The Friend*, Edition of 21 August 1914, bound volume for 1914, p. 623.

22 Letter from Ernest H. Bennis entitled 'Rising prices – the case for the shopkeeper', in *The Friend*, Edition of 28 August 1914, bound volume for 1914, p. 638.

23 From 'Current News Among Friends', edition of 21 August 1914, bound volume for 1914, p. 622.

24 'Current News Among Friends', edition of 21 August 1914, bound volume for 1914, p. 626. See also Muir, A., *The History of Baker Perkins*, Cambridge: Heffer, 1968, p. 61.

25 From 'Current News Among Friends', edition of 21 August 1914, bound volume for 1914, p. 626.

Albright & Wilson

World War I, then, was a time of change and uncertainty for many businesses, particularly those which operated internationally. One such firm was Albright & Wilson, a business founded in the mid-nineteenth century by two Birmingham-based Quakers, Arthur Albright and John Edward Wilson. I begin by outlining the business's activities before highlighting some key figures within the business at the time of World War I. I then give a brief profile of the business from just before the outbreak of war through to May 1915, before conducting a relatively detailed analysis of business affairs from June and July 1915 to demonstrate the divisions caused by the business's war work and a broader analysis of Albright & Wilson's activities during the later period of the war, looking at the rise of two key figures – Charles David Sykes and Richard Threlfall. Finally, I provide a post-war snapshot of the state of the firm.

Albright & Wilson had begun its life manufacturing phosphorus, and this continued throughout its history. Upon its conversion to a private limited company in 1892 all of Albright & Wilson's shares were held by members of the two families, men and women.²⁶ The Albright and Wilson families were linked by marriage: John Edward Wilson married Arthur Albright's wife Rachel's sister Catherine not long after the foundation of the business in 1857.²⁷ After the deaths of its founders in the early twentieth century, control of the firm passed into the hands of their sons. By 1908 the firm's business was mostly manufacturing phosphorus for matches.²⁸ Arthur Albright, through extensive travelling,²⁹ had nurtured a firm that was international in its character: by the outbreak of war in 1914 it had agents in Sweden, France and Austria, each representing several countries. Further, the business had subsidiaries across the Atlantic. In New York State it had opened the Oldbury Electro-Chemical Company, at Niagara Falls, in 1896, and begun the manufacture of phosphorus there by electric furnaces. Not long afterwards, in 1902, it took over the Electric Reduction Company, a struggling competitor in Buckingham, Quebec, Canada.³⁰

The two eldest sons from each family entered the business as directors, along with the third sons, Henry Lloyd Wilson and Frank Albright, who were less actively involved as extra-ordinary directors. The sons who were active in the business were William Arthur Albright, George Stacey Albright, John William Wilson and George Edward Wilson. Arthur Albright, the chemist in the original partnership, using a maritime analogy, described John Edward Wilson as the captain, his own sons William Arthur and George Stacey as 'first-mate' and

26 See dividend certificates in private letter books in several boxes of MS1724, Wolfson Centre for Archival Research, Library of Birmingham.

27 Threlfall, *100 Years*.

28 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 124.

29 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 124.

30 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 124.

‘sailing-master and cartographer’, and John William and George Edward Wilson as officers.³¹

Key Members of the Business at the Outbreak of War in 1914

William Arthur Albright lived from 1853 until 1942 and, like his father, was a committed Quaker throughout his lifetime. In his biography of Friends he knew at Bull Street Meeting in Birmingham, William Adlington Cadbury says of William Arthur that he ‘lived a life of devoted service for his Master and for the Religious Society of Friends: firstly in his own meeting at Bull Street, also for smaller groups of Friends in the Quarterly Meeting’.³² He entered the business in 1877 initially as an engineer, was also works manager for some years, and was chairman of Albright & Wilson from 1903.

John William Wilson, often known as Jack, lived from 1858 until 1932. William Adlington Cadbury records his presence as son of John Edward and therefore a birthright Friend at Bull Street, but gives no further detail about his attendance. He does appear in the membership list of Worcestershire and Shropshire Monthly Meeting from 1897, but does not appear in any meeting records across the levels of meeting.³³ From 1895 he was MP for North Worcestershire, and he remained an MP throughout World War I. He was peripherally involved in the Friends’ Ambulance Unit during the war. He entered the business in 1879 in the commercial and sales sphere, soon taking charge of contracts.³⁴

George Stacey Albright lived from 1855 until 1945. He joined the business in 1879 as a chemist, like his father. I can find no record of his remaining an active member of the Religious Society of Friends, though his obituary in the journal of the Chemical Society credits him with membership. Taking over the laboratory, Richard E. Threlfall attributed to him considerable research development and responsibility for recruiting more scientists.³⁵

George Edward Wilson lived from 1860 to 1927. He moved to a manor near Kidderminster, Worcestershire in 1890.³⁶ Cadbury suggests that he moved his membership to Stourbridge Quaker Meeting in Worcestershire, presumably at this time, though it seems unlikely that he maintained this, as he is not present in the Worcestershire members list.³⁷ He joined the business in 1882, having trained

31 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 46.

32 Cadbury, W. A., ‘Bull Street Friends I have Known’, p. 2, SF 3/4/11/2, Wolfson Centre.

33 Worcestershire and Shropshire Monthly Meeting Minutes, p. 63, 1304, parcel 4, 898.2, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, The Hive, Worcester.

34 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 83.

35 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 85.

36 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 88.

37 Cadbury, p. 82, Worcestershire and Shropshire Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1304, parcel 4.

as a chemist, but gave up working in the workshop around 1897 in favour of office work, particularly with accounts at first.³⁸

Having been granted shares in 1906, George Edward's oldest son Kenneth Henry Wilson joined the company in 1908 and was given a place on the Board of Directors just a year later.³⁹ Kenneth Henry, who lived from 1885 to 1969, seems to have been active in the Religious Society of Friends for a considerable part of his life, although, whereas his father transferred his membership to Stourbridge, he was active in Bull Street Quaker Meeting in Birmingham throughout World War I.⁴⁰

In 1899 George Stacey Albright recruited Richard Threlfall, an experimental physicist, engineer, chemist and technologist, to the firm.⁴¹ Threlfall, who lived from 1861 to 1932, joined the Board of Directors in 1901. By this time he had become an important force in the business as its chief technologist, driving innovation. He was not a Quaker.

Another member of the Board of Directors, who joined in 1901, was John Eliot Howard Lloyd, of the Quaker Lloyd branch and son of a banker.⁴² He lived from 1872 to 1933. Eliot acted largely as the firm's secretary and does not seem to have been active in a Quaker meeting.

Henry Lloyd Wilson, John Edward's third son, lived from 1862 to 1941. He was a very active Quaker who performed numerous local roles and had been clerk of Yearly Meeting, as well as serving on the War and Social Order Committee during World War I.⁴³ He was not active in the day-to-day running of Albright & Wilson and, instead, along with his younger brother Alfred, was a director of J & E Sturge, a Quaker chemists in Edgbaston out of which Albright & Wilson had initially grown.

In addition to these directors, the works manager at the outbreak of World War I was Charles David Sykes, a non-Quaker. There was also, among key employees in the business at the outbreak of the war, a research chemist, A. A. King, who attended and was active within George Road Preparative Meeting in Edgbaston, Birmingham.⁴⁴

The Outbreak of War to April 1915

Thus, in the period immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I, the regular attenders at the monthly Board of Directors meetings were William Arthur Albright as chair (hereafter referred to as William Arthur), John William Wilson (hereafter referred to as John William), George Stacey Albright (hereafter

38 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 87.

39 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 157, 160.

40 Birmingham Preparative Meeting Minute Book, 1914, SF/3/4/1/1/17 Wolfson Centre.

41 Papers re: Negotiations with RT, Box 14, MS1724.

42 Charles E. G. Pease, <http://www.pennyghael.org.uk/Lloyd.pdf> (2016), p. 108.

43 War and the Social Order Committee Minute Book, 1915–1917, LSF.

44 George Road Preparative Meeting Minute Book 3, SF/3/9/1/3, Wolfson Centre.

referred to as George Stacey), Henry Lloyd Wilson (hereafter referred to as Henry Lloyd), Richard Threlfall, George Edward Wilson (hereafter referred to as George Edward), Kenneth Henry Wilson (hereafter referred to as Kenneth Henry) and John Eliot Howard Lloyd (hereafter referred to as John Eliot).⁴⁵

The role of the Board of Directors was principally to approve decisions or actions suggested by the Management Committee, which usually met weekly. This committee consisted principally of William Arthur, John William, George Stacey, George Edward, Richard Threlfall and Kenneth Henry.⁴⁶ At least two of these six, William Arthur and Kenneth Henry, were active Quakers.

Upon England's declaration of war in August 1914 the business's international nature and its finances were the prime cause for concern. Financially, Albright & Wilson was a growing and prosperous business at that time. The Management Committee considered reducing production 'in view of the difficulty of shipping and lack of foreign orders'.⁴⁷ Sykes' report that would confirm the precise decision as regards production has been lost, but we do know that most of Albright & Wilson's plants closed on Mondays and Saturdays, although no men were laid off.⁴⁸ The business committed to leaving posts open for those men who were called up as territorials or ambulance men, and to ensuring that their dependents did not suffer financially in the meantime.⁴⁹ The decision as to what to do with regard to men who joined the armed forces as active fighting men was taken by the Works Committee, whose minutes from this period do not survive.

Over the next few months the firm struggled with regard to communications and affairs with German business contacts particularly. At the December meeting of the Board of Directors it was agreed to write off a considerable debt owed to them by one German company.⁵⁰ Sales to Switzerland also suffered.⁵¹ In February the firm was in negotiations with the government about the sale of land for a factory: this seems to be the first hint of any interactions directly related to the war.

By March 1915, owing to uncertainty about business prospects, the firm had looked into processes for the manufacture of zinc and baking powder, and it was not long before the company began producing both of these products.⁵² Simultaneously, it was the acquisition of raw materials that proved particularly hard: according to John William in a letter to the Managing Director of Bryant

45 Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61, MS1724.

46 Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62, MS1724.

47 Minute 1247, 11 August 1914, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

48 Minute 1247, 11 August 1914, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

49 Minute 1248, 11 August 1914, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

50 Minute 107, 22 December 1914, Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61.

51 Minute 1330, 9 Feb 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

52 Minutes 1349, Meeting of 9 Mar 1915, and Minute 1361, Meeting of 20 April 1916, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

and May, a supplier and customer, 'Manufacturing conditions are getting more difficult here every day, especially in coal & labour, and if this continues we shall have to take steps to protect ourselves.'⁵³ By this time the business had also begun to supply the Admiralty with phosphate of calcium, presumably for some war-related purpose.⁵⁴

Seeds of Division and the Loss of Control: May–June 1915

It was abundantly clear by mid-May 1915 that Richard Threlfall, a non-Quaker, did not share William Arthur's inherited Quaker pacifist leanings: in an indirect response to a mother enquiring as to whether there might be any work for her son at Albright & Wilson, Richard Threlfall abruptly declared that 'At the present moment ... when every decent young fellow in England is doing something for his country, when the universities are empty, and when my own three sons are on service you will understand that there can only be one kind of advice that I could offer.'⁵⁵

Almost simultaneously, the War Trade Department issued an edict banning the export of phosphorus without licence except to British colonies and protectorates as from 20 May.⁵⁶ This was presumably in order to prevent the supply of chemicals for weapons to enemy countries, after their use had begun and been noted. This measure clearly had the potential to be devastating for Albright & Wilson's trade with non-enemy countries such as Japan and Sweden, which had largely been unaffected as yet. At the Management Committee meeting of 1 June this edict was reported and discussed. A request from another chemical firm for large quantities of white phosphorus for government war use was also reported.⁵⁷ This evidently triggered William Arthur's uneasy conscience, as by the Board of Directors' meeting later that afternoon he had decided to donate '£500 to the [pension] fund by way of defence to himself from war transactions'.⁵⁸

From spring 1915, the business came increasingly under government control. The nature of Albright and Wilson's chemical manufacture increased the degree and speed of this control because the government could use its products for war purposes such as smokescreens and grenades. In practice, whilst the staff remained the same, by June 1915 the government determined both the nature and quantity of Albright & Wilson's production.⁵⁹ This loss of control was fundamental in altering the direction and the character of the business in all its areas.

53 John William Wilson, letter of 16 March 1915, Private Letter Book vol. 5 1913–1915, Box 65, MS1724, p. 330.

54 Item 1386, Management Committee File, 1915, Box 1, MS1724.

55 Richard Threlfall, letter of 18 May 1915, Private letter book vol. 5 1913–1915, Box 65, pp. 371–72.

56 Minute 1380, Meeting of 1 June 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

57 Minute 1380, Meeting of 1 June 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

58 Minute 123, 1 June 1915, Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61.

59 Minutes of meetings in June 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

Shipping had become more difficult from the outset, but as the war went on international trade became increasingly difficult. The earlier edict of 20 May banning the export of phosphorus had by July entirely prohibited the majority of Albright & Wilson's business, as licences were hard to come by, although it was granted licences to supply phosphorus to Italy and to the French government, the latter for war purposes.⁶⁰ However, some transport routes had to be changed owing to government suspicion. By June 1915 Albright & Wilson was forbidden from even providing a quote to one of its Danish customers, Erikson, owing to government suspicion and hostility around exports.⁶¹ This must all have made the government's demand that Albright & Wilson supply phosphorus for munitions in June 1915 harder for those of a pragmatic mind-set in the business to resist.

Also in June 1915, Richard Threlfall was appointed by the Ministry of Munitions to a new committee established to advise the War Office on the country's capacity for chemical warfare. We hear from him about exploring options for bombs with War Office chemists and, crucially, about the business's decision to carry on down that path:

My trouble was that W. A.A. [as William Arthur was known] said he would leave us if we helped with experiments, etc. – but to-day we decided that I was to do what I liked; but I am afraid it will end in W. A.A. clearing out. The rest of us can't see why the Germans should kill our chaps with Cl and H₂SO₄ [sulphuric acid] and we make no reply.⁶²

There was also, of course, the probability that war work would help to reverse the firm's decreasing profits to consider. I suspect 'the rest of us' to be an oversimplification: it was not just William Arthur who had doubts about the business's munitions work, as we will see shortly. For those Quakers among the Board who were absolute pacifists, such as William Arthur, this went further than merely carrying out government orders: Richard Threlfall would be directly aiding the development of weapons. Still, at this point the business was not yet ordered to produce munitions.

The Unravelling: June to July 1915, and Beyond

For a short while, then, during June and some of July the Board and Management Committee were in a limbo of sorts. As was detailed above, by the Management Committee meeting of 22 June the commercial situation otherwise had worsened. It was at this meeting, too, that Richard Threlfall reported a direct request to the business for large quantities of phosphorus for war purposes. While William

⁶⁰ Minute 1411, Meeting of 13 July 1915, and Minute 1420, Meeting of 27 July 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

⁶¹ Minute 1397, Meeting of 22 June 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

⁶² Richard Threlfall in Threlfall, p. 167, Minute 297, Meeting of 24 September 1917, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

Arthur was at the meeting, he seems to have stopped acting as chair, as George Stacey signed the minutes in his place.⁶³ At the Board Meeting that followed on that day it became apparent that funds were insufficient to pay ordinary shareholders the half-yearly dividend.

A couple of weeks passed with no further Management Committee meetings, but in early July William Arthur made his feelings very clear in a letter written to a colleague in one of the subsidiary businesses:

We (A and W) are being pressed to aid the Government in supplying horrors to meet the German chlorine gas and this is making me feel very uneasy, for as you probably know I would not take part in the war in any way directly or indirectly if I could help it. Indirectly we are all mixed up and involved inextricably with what is going on but this direct taking part in the affair is more than I can stand and I know at least one of our directors feels the same while others feel that the only right thing to do is to back the Government up in every possible way.⁶⁴

William Arthur in fact submitted his resignation as chair and from the Board of Directors that very day, as did his cousin Henry Lloyd four days later for the same reasons.⁶⁵ Up to this point Henry Lloyd had been a regular attendee at Board Meetings. William Arthur did not attend the Management Committee meeting of 13 July 1915, at which the resignation letters were mentioned and referred to the next Board meeting. A copy of the notice that went up in the works concerning the resignations was featured in the 30 July edition of the Quaker magazine *The Friend*, which stated that William Arthur and Henry Lloyd had resigned because they believed all war to be wrong.⁶⁶ It also noted William Arthur's role as chairman of the Friends' War Victim Relief Committee.⁶⁷

At the next Board of Directors' Meeting, on 27 July 1915, the resignations were regretted and the other directors expressed hope that both members might return to the board later, their places remaining open for them. John William took over as chair of the firm.⁶⁸ Kenneth Henry remained both an active Quaker and involved in the business, illustrating perhaps some pragmatism, as well as the diversity of views and divisions among Friends at the time. A. A. King, a Quaker chemist in the business, also maintained both his work and his religion.⁶⁹ Kenneth Henry and William Arthur both continued to be active in Bull Street Quaker Meeting, further demonstrating this diversity of views amongst Quakers

63 Minutes 1397 and 1400, 22 June 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

64 William Arthur Albright, letter of 6 July 1915, Private Letter Book vol. 5 1913–1915, Box 65, pp. 390–91.

65 Letters of resignation, Misc Directors Papers, Box 7, MS1724.

66 *The Friend*, 30 July 1915, p. 595.

67 *The Friend*, 30 July 1915, p. 595.

68 Minute 146, Meeting of 27 July 1915, Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61.

69 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 172. George Road Preparative Meeting Minute Book 3, SF/3/9/1/3, Wolfson Centre.

confronted with the pacifist dilemma in their business activities.⁷⁰ While William Arthur's resignation was decisive, the actual process of withdrawing from the business, particularly for William Arthur, was more complex.

The first government order for phosphorus for munitions came in August 1915, with an order for the manufacture of 350,000 grenades filled with amorphous phosphorus.⁷¹ Some of this demand was met by importing from one of Albright & Wilson's subsidiary businesses in the United States.⁷² The expected output for the government was 20,000 grenades per week, and the business needed to extend its furnace house in order to satisfy this demand. In September 1915 Albright & Wilson's non-government production amounted to around 50,000lbs of phosphorus, and the quantity demanded by the Ministry of Munitions was similar to this, therefore doubling output demand almost overnight.⁷³ Although the government implied that the business could still maintain its other customers this became increasingly hard as the war went on, as is explained below.

Financially, the government orders boosted profits by around £20,000 compared with the previous year, to more than £100,000. However, increased taxation and the new Excess Profits Duty consumed a considerable amount of the additional profits.⁷⁴

August 1915 to 1918: Government Control and Shifts in Power

As of 31 January 1916 Albright & Wilson officially became a controlled establishment, under the government's oversight.⁷⁵ At the Board meeting of 22 February 1916 it was reported that William Arthur had chosen to remain chair of the pension fund, but returned his dividend.⁷⁶ His ordinary shares were transferred to Richard Threlfall, who was becoming more deeply involved in war work by this time: before long he had invented the 'Threllfalite' grenade, made with a mixture of phosphorus and petrol.⁷⁷ This share transfer is symbolic of a shift in the balance of power in the firm, caused by the war—out of Quaker and into non-Quaker hands: as I have acknowledged, this was by no means straightforward or universal, but the evidence is there. For example, alongside Richard Threlfall's increasing power, over the course of 1918 Charles David Sykes rises within the firm, writing almost all its reports and seeking and acquiring a title

70 Birmingham Preparative Meeting Minute Book, 1914, SF/3/4/1/1/17, Wolfson Centre.

71 Document for minute 1440, Management Committee File, 1915, Box 1.

72 Minute 1440, Meeting of 26 August 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

73 Minute 1446, Meeting of 14 September 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

74 Annual report for 1915 in Annual Reports 1892–1931, Box 48, MS1724.

75 1 February 1916, AGM minutes, Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61.

76 Minutes 160 and 161, Meeting of 22 February 1916, Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61.

77 Threlfall, *100 Years*, p. 169, also mentioned in Minute 1440, Meeting of 26 August 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

change from works manager to general works manager. These reports largely determined the action the business would take: it was fairly rare that they were not agreed by the Management Committee. By February 1919 Sykes had been given a place on the Management Committee.⁷⁸

In December 1915 the business had been told that it was no longer permitted to quote for business in China or Japan,⁷⁹ and by November 1916 exports to Sweden were also being restricted: by October 1917 Jonkoping, the main match company Albright & Wilson supplied in Sweden, had combined with another local match company to acquire phosphorus from France because of the difficulty of getting supplies from the UK.⁸⁰ However, this was not the end of the damage to Albright & Wilson's customer base, as in January 1918 it was learned that phosphorus production had begun in Sweden, presumably partly because of the impossibility of acquiring supplies from Albright & Wilson.⁸¹ While understandable, this created a new competitor for the firm and deprived it of a key market.

During 1916 the quantity of phosphorus demanded by the government increased still further, and one request from the Admiralty was simply impossible to meet. In August 1916 the Ministry of Munitions took control of the distribution of tungsten powder, further extending their control over Albright & Wilson.⁸² In 1917 there was talk of the Ministry directly taking over phosphorus production. This takeover seems to have largely taken place around July 1917.⁸³ The Ministry of Munitions even ordered the purchase of land and the construction of a whole new plant in December 1916, though production did not start until mid-1917.⁸⁴ An extension to the plant at Oldbury was also ordered, with production starting in September 1918.⁸⁵ The business's US sister company, the Electric Reduction Company, for whom many of Albright & Wilson's directors also acted as directors, supplied the US government with phosphorus for war purposes in 1918.⁸⁶

In 1917 there was also a shortage of cartons and a power supply deficiency.⁸⁷ All of this was pushing the business to its limits, but in October 1917 the business's contact at the Ministry of Munitions insisted on phosphorus production remaining

78 Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62, MS1724.

79 Minute 1506, Meeting of 21 December 1915, Weekly Minute Book 1908–1916, Box 62.

80 Minute 113 meeting of 28 November 1916, Meeting of 23 October 1917, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

81 Minute 363, Meeting of 1 January 1918, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

82 Minute 49, Meeting of 7 August 1916, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

83 Ministry of Munitions Draft Contract 8536/2B, 21 July 1917, Box 102, MS1724, Library of Birmingham. Also 1917 Correspondence re: Munitions Work, Box 102.

84 Minute 174, Meeting of 28 December 1916, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Minute 222, Meeting of 1 June 1917, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

85 Minute 530, Meeting of 10 September 1917, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

86 Minute 431, Meeting of 9 April 1918, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

87 Minutes 164 and 165, Meeting of 27 February 1917, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

as high as possible, despite concerns that they would soon be producing more than necessary.⁸⁸ In early 1918 the business began to investigate the possibility of the production of magnesium,⁸⁹ a sign that the directors were considering the firm's production after the war, in light of the current overproduction. Simultaneously the Management Committee, fearing the consequences of overproduction of phosphorus for the business, again sought the Ministry of Munition's permission to reduce the production of phosphorus at Oldbury slightly, to no avail.⁹⁰

Over this period the government also formally controlled exactly which foreign businesses Albright & Wilson could communicate and trade with. This process was far from straightforward and consumed considerable time and energy.⁹¹ It also controlled wages and prices, objecting, for example, to an advance for the men in the gas plant in September 1916, among many other incidents.⁹²

During this time, the business made huge profits in 1916 of £190,930 5s 4d, from which about £75,000 was deducted in taxation. This, therefore, still left a considerable amount, much of which was invested in war loans and elsewhere.⁹³ War loans were loans from firms or individuals to the government to finance the war effort, with an attractive rate of interest. The choice to invest in war loans came in July 1915, after the pacifist William Arthur's departure,⁹⁴ and it is hard to imagine this decision to fund military activity being taken were he still present. The shareholder dividend also increased in this year to 30 per cent, compared with 25 per cent in 1911 and 27.5 per cent in 1913.⁹⁵ In 1917 increasing government control and further taxation restricted profits somewhat, and these sat at £113,582 13s 3d.⁹⁶ By 1918 profits were at roughly pre-war levels, at £85,090 18s 2d.⁹⁷ However, as is made evident below, the situation otherwise was vastly altered for the worse as a result of the war.

Over the course of the war, as was the case generally, some men at Albright & Wilson were called up for military service, though many gained exemptions as they were doing war work at home. Albright & Wilson needed to take on more women to replace the men who had gone and to meet the increase in demand. Total staff numbers almost tripled to 1,355. The number of men employed nearly doubled to 864, and the number of women employed rose more than fifty times

88 Minute 307, Meeting of 9 October 1917, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

89 Minute 392, Meeting of 12 February 1918, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

90 Documents 389, 412 in Management Committee File, 1918, Box 5, MS1724. Also Minute 412, Meeting of 12 March 1918, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

91 See letters in Bundle 40 of papers re suspension of Trade w/ Europe, Box 55, MS1724.

92 Minute 72, Meeting of 19 September 1916, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

93 Annual Report for 1916 in Annual Reports 1892–1931, Box 48.

94 Minute 145, Meeting of 27 July 1915, Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61.

95 Annual Reports 1892–1931, Box 48.

96 Annual Report for 1917, Annual Reports 1892–1931, Box 48.

97 Annual Report for 1918, Annual Reports 1892–1931, Box 48.

to 426.⁹⁸ This consequence of the government demand for increased production led to the need for more physical space, such as a new tea room, which would add to costs once staff numbers inevitably decreased after the war ended.⁹⁹

Over this period Richard Threlfall became increasingly involved with research and advice for the government concerning munitions. In this way the business was indirectly being drawn further and further into war work, and therefore away from the Quaker commitment to peace.

The Legacy of the War

When the war ended in November 1918 Albright & Wilson had lost the vast majority of its international suppliers and customers. Its agreement with Bryant and May, which was both a supplier and customer, remained relatively intact and was therefore salvaged, but other than this the business had to rebuild from the ground upwards, approaching other firms about possible contracts. The war had seen all supply at Albright & Wilson diverted to its cause, other business and connections lost, and new plants opening at home and abroad.

Having built up huge stocks of phosphorus of around 500 tons, in November 1918 production was immediately reduced by about a third. In early March 1919, owing to a lack of business, it was necessary to cease phosphorus production at Oldbury entirely for at least a year. This proved devastating for the business and its employees. Hundreds of jobs were lost and many others suspended in 1919.¹⁰⁰

After the war had ended, its negative financial impact on the business began to be felt. In addition to its own high stocks of phosphorus, the firm had to buy back up to 1,000 tons of phosphorus it had already supplied to the government and remove it from the shells, partly in order to eliminate competition.¹⁰¹ The price at which Albright & Wilson bought it back (determined by the government) was between a third and a quarter of the price it had originally received from the Ministry, at 9½d per lb of phosphorus. The large stocks of phosphorus meant that prices needed to be reduced after the war, which reduced profits.¹⁰² The war also triggered a recession, closely followed by a depression by 1921. Profits dropped to £47,000 by 1919 and in 1921 Albright & Wilson made a loss of £22,000, before making a net profit of £12,000 the following year.¹⁰³

One of now general works manager Charles David Sykes's first recommendations once the end of the war was in sight was the dismissal of all women from

98 Document relating to minute 612, 'no. of employees', 8 January 1919, in Management Committee File for 1919, Box 5, MS1724.

99 Minute 338, Meeting of 13 Nov 1917, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

100 Document 582, Report by C. D. Sykes, Management Committee File, 1918, Box 5, MS1724.

101 Minute 636, Meeting of 25 February 1919, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

102 Minutes 636 and 637, Meeting of 25 February 1919, Weekly Minute Book 1916–1920, Box 62.

103 Annual reports 1892–1931, Box 48.

the works (which were seen as separate to the office and management, where some women remained employed).¹⁰⁴ Half of the women in the works were working in the 'bomb shop', and therefore justifying their dismissal after the war was simplest.

Sykes's view was that, while the women's work had been valuable, it was not appropriate for women to be working in a chemical processing factory.¹⁰⁵ The directors approved his report. Therefore, while all staff were put on short time fairly soon after the end of the war, it was the women who were the first to lose their jobs, with all of them being given notice that their work would end in early December 1918. By January 1919 the business employed less than half its war time total: 717,623 men, thirty women, and sixty-four in the office and management.¹⁰⁶ When the phosphorus plant had to close in March 1919 those men who had been employed there were given a considerable pay cut to the garden labourers' rate, partly to incentivise them to look for work elsewhere. The firm was generally reluctant to make men entirely redundant where there were other possibilities, such as this.

Government control did not fully end until well into 1919, around six months after the end of the war, and the business was extricating itself from financial interactions with the government for longer still. It maintained munitions work in some form for the government until at least 1926, with an agreement from the government not to acquire phosphorus elsewhere.¹⁰⁷ These later negotiations around munitions were largely overseen by Charles David Sykes and the Quaker Kenneth Henry.

Discussion and Conclusion

Albright & Wilson acts as both a case study demonstrating the commercial implications of World War I on manufacturing firms and as an acute study of the ethical disputes in Quaker firms triggered by the war. This latter point also has implications for other ethical issues for Quaker firms and their effects, though few could be so emotive and divisive as war. It highlights the way in which commercial and ethical factors combined to cause decline in Quaker businesses.

Commercially, the war and government control of the firm caused significant harm. The loss of business brought about by severe restrictions to international trade was an initial and severe detrimental factor which worsened as the war went on. The subsequent securing of alternative suppliers by their overseas customers made this worse still, as it ensured that there was no business to pick back up after the war. The total takeover by the government, Bryant and May

104 Document 576, Report re: Women Labour, 9 November 1918, in Management Committee File for 1918, Box 5, MS1724.

105 Document 576, Report re: Women Labour, 9 November 1918, in Management Committee File for 1918, Box 5, MS1724.

106 Document 612, 'no. of employees', 8 January 1919, in Management Committee File for 1919, Box 5.

107 1922 Agreement in green folder of war documents, Box 55.

work excepted, compounded these problems and ensured that the firm needed to build the business back up almost from the ground. What is more, it made maintaining some military work highly attractive commercially. Arguably, coming back as a business of any kind in these circumstances was a significant challenge. By providing an in-depth study of one business during World War I, this case study demonstrates in detail how devastating war could be for business, especially when government control was also involved.

Further, the leadership of the business had changed fundamentally and permanently: in March 1919 William Arthur was invited to return to the firm as its chair once more, but in November he declined this invitation.¹⁰⁸ William Arthur's withdrawal was more complex than the simple transfer of his shares or resignation of his status as chair of the business. He remained named on share certificates received by the company, and he was of course still family with most of the other directors.¹⁰⁹ He did correspond on business matters occasionally, presumably when consulted. He also maintained his position as chair of the company pension fund. In 1920 William Arthur felt able to take back most of his shares, though it would seem he did so principally to sell them, as he offered them to others only a few days later.¹¹⁰ William Arthur's personal case shows how difficult it could be to cease activities within and associations with a family Quaker business, even where that is clearly the person's desire. Unsurprisingly, given his minimal role and pacifism, there is no evidence that Henry Lloyd was invited to return. The departure of these Quaker figures on account of their pacifist principles was a significant factor in the business ceasing to be Quaker, and therefore, when replicated in other firms, as is demonstrated below, in Quaker business decline more broadly.

As has been shown, chair John William did not seek to cease military involvement at Albright & Wilson even after the end of World War I. Therefore, while he meets the membership requirements for Quakerism (and is therefore arguably technically or nominally Quaker), he does not fulfil either of the other two obligations: he is not an active Quaker, in that he does not seem to have attended meeting; and, despite his involvement in the Friends Ambulance Unit, he does not appear to adhere to peace, a key testimony and principle of Quakerism. While it can be argued that Quakers could exercise personal choice around the pacifist question during war time and retain their Quaker identity,¹¹¹ it is not possible to reconcile the Quaker Peace Testimony with actively choosing militarist involvement in peace time, even for commercial reasons. There is also evidence that John William at least occasionally attended an Anglican church.¹¹²

108 Board of Directors' Minute book 1913–1925, Box 61.

109 Numerous certificates can be found in: Private Letters 1918, Box 73.

110 Letters of 28 January 1920 from John Eliot to A. Godlee, and of 2 February 1920 from William Arthur, Private Letters 1920, Box 73.

111 Bishop and Jung, 'Seeking Peace: Quakers respond to war', pp. 115–16.

112 Private Letters, 1918, Box 73.

In this case, as John William became chair of the business during the war, this is a crucial factor in the business as a whole ceasing to be Quaker; the position of chair was pivotal for a firm of this kind at this time in determining a business's overall direction.

Simultaneously, as the war progressed, the influence of the non-family, non-Quaker figures Richard Threlfall and Charles David Sykes significantly increased. By the end of the war many key decisions were being made or heavily influenced by these two people. This could be for various reasons. I would suggest that John William had a considerable role in their rise, given its timing after he became chair, and that he seems to have had less of an interest in the business remaining notably Quaker. The rise of Threlfall and Sykes further consolidated the move away from Quaker control.

The rise of non-Quakers over the course of the war and the resignations of William Arthur and Henry Lloyd Wilson meant that World War I shifted the balance at Board meetings and on the Management Committee from roughly equal representation to non-Quakers and non-practising Quakers being in the majority over Quakers. While there were still active Quakers, such as Kenneth Henry Wilson, in influential positions in the firm, those Quakers who were strongly pacifist and who felt the need to put principles before pragmatism had gone. The few other Quaker shareholders that presumably existed, such as other family members and one or two employees, showed no real interest in the business's affairs during this time. For example, none of them attended the Annual General Meetings during the war, though more did attend after the business made a loss in 1921, suggesting that their main motivation may have been financial.¹¹³ World War I's raising of the pacifist question at Albright & Wilson, heightened by the commercial situation the firm faced, ultimately ended the business's status as Quaker.

Looking more broadly at other Quaker businesses, which had different functions and usually were not required to manufacture munitions (though Baker and Sons was), the war still usually touched their activities in some way. Cadbury's made chocolate for the troops,¹¹⁴ while Clark, Son & Morland made gloves for them.¹¹⁵ As with most other businesses, Quaker firms by no means escaped commercial difficulties in some form, such as wage and price controls, and they often experienced severe difficulties with supply. Were these difficulties severe enough, they could of course spell the end of a business in themselves. Various Quaker firms either began talks about mergers or merged with other firms during the war, which, depending on management and control, could lead to loss of a Quaker identity at the firm. Examples include Baker and Sons, who worked together with

113 Annual Reports 1892–1931, Box 48.

114 Cadbury, D., *Chocolate Wars*, London: HarperCollins, 2010, pp. 235–36.

115 Letter from William Stephens Clark to Hilda Clark, 26 February 1916, HC 3/1, Alfred Gillett Trust.

another non-Quaker firm during the war and merged with them in 1919.¹¹⁶ This began the dilution of the Quaker ethic at the firm, which was further consolidated by a change in chair in 1918, as we will see below.

While many Quaker business people seem to have wanted to do something with regard to the war, it was the outworking and development of their views, especially as the war went on, that proved divisive for families and businesses. This is confirmed by the fact that, elsewhere, there were also splits of one kind or another in other Quaker families—the Bakers, the Cadburys, the Clarks—as a result of the war. Kennedy notes that nearly a third of young Quaker men did enlist to fight, despite the Society's institutional pacifism.¹¹⁷ Some of these splits had a considerable effect on business leadership. In the case of Clark, Son & Morland, a rug manufacturing firm related to C & J Clark's, for example, it seems highly likely that William Stephens Clark resigned as chair, and Roger Clark as director, as a matter of conscience; by February 1916 they felt unable to continue involvement in a firm manufacturing gloves for workers in ammunition factories.¹¹⁸ This would undoubtedly have had a considerable impact on the firm's business activities, as well as being a personal wrench, as both had had senior roles in the firm for more than twenty years.¹¹⁹ At Baker and Sons, a manufacturer of bread-making machinery based in London, we see not resignation from the firm but from the Religious Society of Friends: it is recorded by those who went to interview him that by April 1916 Allan Richard Baker and his wife (who remains unnamed) regarded:

participation in the present war as a national duty, and recognise that they are in consequence at variance with an important principle of the Society of Friends. They have no other disagreement with those principles; but they feel it to be the honest and straight-forward course to resign their membership.¹²⁰

Allan Richard would go on to become chairman of the business in 1918 upon the death of his predecessor and father Joseph Allen Baker,¹²¹ so his departure from the Society would have had some impact on its Quaker character, at least during his time in the firm. As these examples, alongside that of Albright & Wilson, make apparent, the issue of defining a Quaker business is not in itself simple. What is more, the tension between the war and the Peace Testimony had profound consequences for Quaker businesses, leading several to cease being Quaker.

116 Muir, *The History of Baker Perkins*, pp. 55–68.

117 Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920*, p. 313.

118 Letter from William Stephens Clark to Hilda Clark, 26 February 1916, HC 3/1.

119 Milligan, E. H., *Biographical Dictionary of British Quakers in Commerce and Industry: 1775–1920*, York: Sessions Book Trust, 2007, pp. 109, 110, 310.

120 Letter attached to minutes, addressed to Westminster & Longford Monthly Meeting from R. Hingston Fox and Elizabeth Hingston Fox from London on 13 April 1916, Westminster & Longford Monthly Meeting Minutes, vol. 29, p. 115, LSF.

121 Muir, *The History of Baker Perkins*, p. 209.

The story of Albright & Wilson shows in detail how World War I brought significant change and potential decline for businesses generally. As such detailed war-time case studies are rare for British companies, it is therefore of relevance to business historians generally, as well as to historians of war, in informing and altering narratives. For example, I would suggest that it runs counter to the general trend of management history in British firms identified by Wilson and Thomson that managers had minimal control at this time.¹²² I would also highlight the volume of material available for further study of Albright & Wilson as a war-time business from other perspectives.

Particularly when considered with the resignations in other Quaker businesses, the example of Albright & Wilson also shows the additional difficulties and divisions a commitment to pacifism could bring to Quaker businesses during war time. This has ramifications for the potential impact of other ethical dilemmas in business, and therefore is relevant to business ethicists, those interested in corporate social responsibility and others in similar fields. As Quakerism was central to the changes that occurred at Albright & Wilson, this research is most evidently of interest to those working in Quaker Studies as well as to members of the Society of Friends themselves. It further nuances their understanding of Quaker reactions to the Peace Testimony in war time, and its impact on the daily lives of those who did not themselves need to make the choice between enlisting or some form of conscientious objection.

As we have seen, in the case of Albright & Wilson it was not simply changes in business leadership brought about by issues of conscience that impacted the firm during World War I. However, these changes, combined with commercial difficulties, went so far as to render the business no longer Quaker. Crises of personal conscience and ethics triggered by World War I are thus a key reason for the decline in Quaker businesses in the twentieth century.

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122 Wilson, J. F. and Thomson, A., *The Making of Modern Management: British management in historical perspective*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 51–74.