

The Peacebuilding Endeavours of Daniel Oliver and the Palestine Watching Committee in Mandate Palestine, 1930–48

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Abstract

This paper analyses the peacebuilding efforts of the official British Religious Society of Friends representative in Mandate Palestine, Daniel Oliver, and the Palestine Watching Committee (PWC). Previously unexamined documentation stored in the Friends House library and Haverford College archives details the extensive negotiations by Oliver and the PWC, which he co-founded, to influence British, Arab and Jewish senior political and royal officials. Combining individual and collective Quaker values concerning the Peace Testimony with a deep focus on British government colonial policies proved problematic. Internal fractions developed over the conduct of British forces in Palestine and the issue of Jewish immigration. Oliver defended the British government and continued to press for peace, demonstrating how patriotism significantly influenced his own spiritually guided message, while the PWC reduced its activities and became despondent over their lack of success and the decline of the Mandate.

Keywords

patriotism, peace, Empire, travel, Arabs, Jews

Introduction

The middle–late nineteenth century saw a surge in Christian missionaries from the UK, France and the US travelling to foreign lands. This growing humanitarian sensibility with an international outlook would continue into the twentieth century.¹ The protestant group known as the Religious Society of

1 Green, A., ‘Humanitarianism in Nineteenth-century Context: religious, gendered, national’, *The Historical Journal* 57 (2014), pp. 1157–75 (p. 1158).

Friends, or Quakers, was part of this wave of philanthropic missionary work, focussing its endeavours predominantly on education through the establishment of schools in Ramallah and Brummana. In 1891 Daniel Oliver met his future wife Emily at the Friends mission school in Brummana.² The couple would later be responsible for the Ras el-Metn orphanage in Lebanon until their deaths in the early 1950s.³ During his time there, Daniel became the British Quakers' official representative in the Middle East.⁴ From World War I onwards he travelled to London, America, Geneva and regularly across the Middle East on numerous peacebuilding endeavours. His journeys across the desert brought him into direct contact with kings and princes, Arab sheiks, Jewish and British political leaders, even rebel leaders in their strongholds.⁵ He co-founded the Palestine Watching Committee (PWC), which was the start of a collective effort by British Quakers to lobby for peace through correspondence with senior British officials. Its primary purpose was to support the British government in bringing Arabs and Jews together through reconciliation.⁶ During the Arab Revolt of 1936 the PWC and Oliver worked extensively towards reconciliation between the conflicting sides. However, disagreements between PWC members and Oliver emerged over issues such as British military conduct and Jewish immigration.

Five years after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 by British and Indian forces, the official British Mandate for Palestine began on 29 September 1923.⁷ Created through the League of Nations, the world's first international intergovernmental organisation, the Mandatory system was designed to make imperial rule more humane and, in theory, to uplift perceived backward populations to such a societal and political level that self-determination was achievable. However, British and French officials who pioneered the Mandatory system sought to maintain imperial authority and legitimise alien rule.⁸ British efforts towards self-determination were often cynical, with the claims of indigenous people for political rights met with repression.⁹ In Palestine, the Mandate system was viewed by the politicised minority as a blatant betrayal of wartime pledges supporting

2 Unknown, *Daniel Oliver Biography*, London: Dictionary of Quaker Biography, n.d., pp. 1–2 (p. 1).

3 Turtle, J. H., 'Emily Oliver', *The Friend* 112 (1954), pp. 836–37; Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 29 March 1946.

4 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 26 June 1947.

5 Bolan, D., 'My Only Enemy Is Daniel Oliver', *The Wayfarer*, vol. XII no. 1 (1953), pp. 9–10.

6 Robson, J. H., L. B. B., 'Palestine Watching Committee Report to Yearly Meeting', *Yearly Meeting Proceedings* (1935), pp. 212–13.

7 Darwin, J., *The Empire Project*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 317.

8 Pedersen, S., *The Guardians: League of Nations and the crisis of empire*, Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2015, p. 13.

9 Pedersen, *The Guardians*, p. 26.

Arab independence in exchange for defeating the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ This resentment was compounded by the Balfour Declaration, a public statement from the government supporting the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people within Palestine. As a result, the Mandate for Palestine continuously faced the threat of civil disorder escalating into violence. After multiple failed political efforts, Palestinian Arabs in 1936 initiated a campaign of civil disobedience through general strikes in urban areas.¹¹ This campaign had little effect and continuing government support for Jewish immigration eventually resulted in the Arab Revolt, which became the largest and most violent anti-colonial insurgency in the Middle East during the interwar years.¹²

Oliver's Early Peacebuilding Initiatives

British Quakers viewed their participation in politics during this period as an opportunity to aid social well-being. They viewed the state as an instrument that could further human values, provided it was not totalitarian or anarchist in its makeup.¹³ They were involved as part of a call for concern to transform moral principles into action.¹⁴ Daniel Oliver followed this concern but demonstrated the influence of patriotism in his actions. When referring to Arabs, Quaker peacebuilding initiatives were to be carried out with what Oliver described as 'our duty to encourage them to hope and expect better'.¹⁵ He praised the efforts of T. E. Lawrence, who was a protean figure viewed by some as a romantic hero and anti-imperialist but by others as an agent of imperialism.¹⁶ Oliver lauded Lawrence to the point that he even tried to replicate Lawrence's role as an 'oriental prophet' through close connections to individuals in Arab militias such as Mowlood Pasha Mukhliss, who was a friend and associate of Lawrence.¹⁷ In previous efforts to broker peace between Arabs and Jews following the riots of 1929, Oliver visited the League of Nations in Geneva alongside Dr Chaim Weizmann, a prominent leader in the World Zionist Movement. Oliver also acted as a go-between for the British High Commissioner and Arabs in the hope of

10 Pedersen, *The Guardians*, p. 77.

11 Norris, J., 'Repression and Rebellion: Britain's response to the Arab Revolt in Palestine of 1936–1939', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008), pp. 25–45; p. 26.

12 Swedenburg, T., *Memories of Revolt: the 1936–1939 rebellion and the Palestinian national past*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. xix.

13 Kumar, M., 'The Quaker Theory of State and Democracy', *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 22 (1961), pp. 144–58 at pp. 145–46.

14 *Quaker Faith and Practice—Fourth Edition*, Hertford: Stephen Austin and Sons Ltd, 2009,

15 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 17 October 1936.

16 Macfie, A. L., 'Representations of Lawrence of Arabia', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43 (2007), pp. 77–87 (pp. 77–78); Said, E. W., *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 2003, pp. 239–43.

17 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 10 March 1937; Said, 'Orientalism', p. 243.

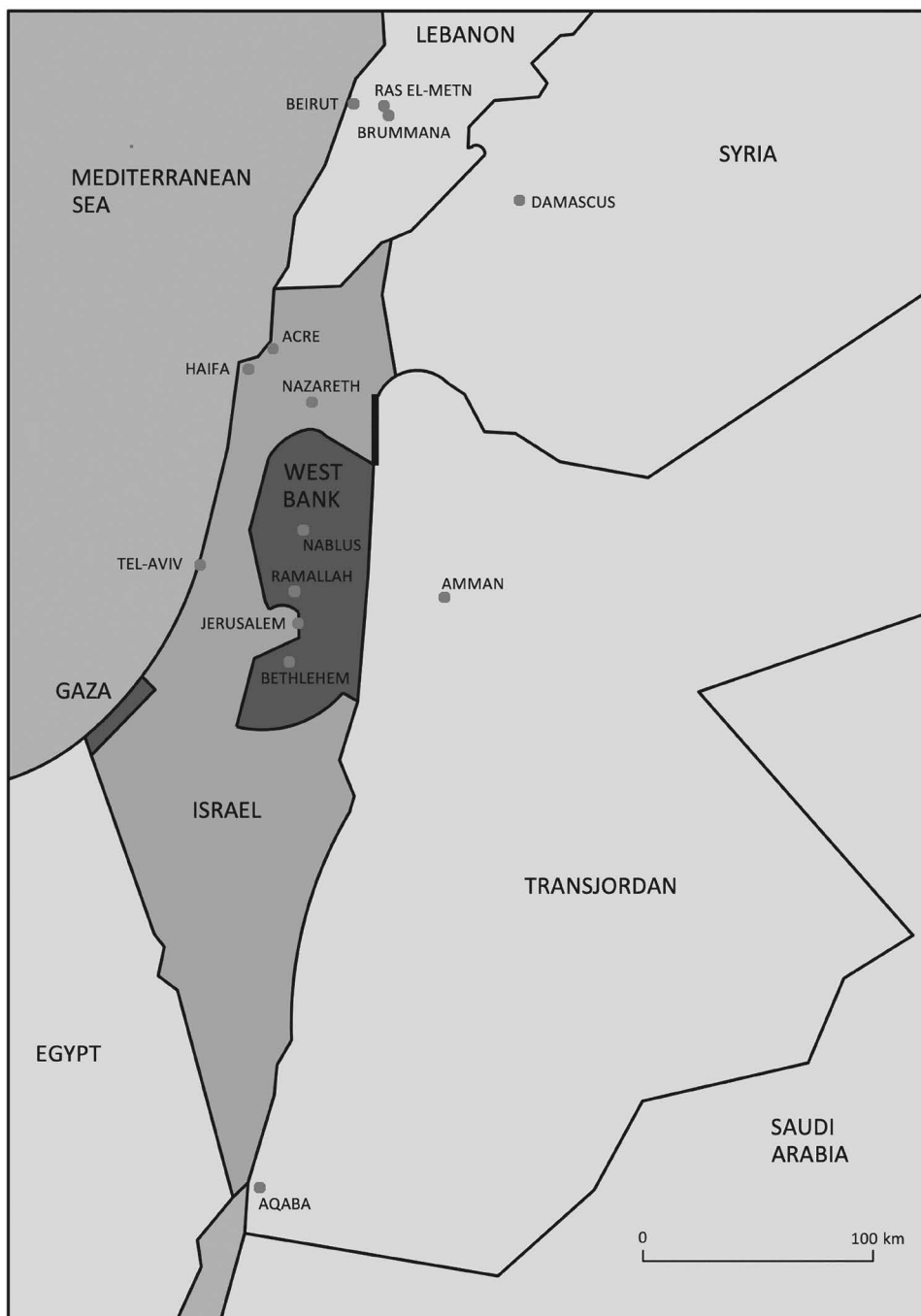


Fig. 1. A map of Palestine and surrounding countries post establishment of Israel, May 1948.

creating an understanding regarding the question of the Wailing Wall. Oliver's efforts failed but, in a recurring theme, he never gave up on the idea that peace between Arabs and Jews could be found.¹⁸ For his efforts, Oliver was awarded the Lebanese Order of Merit by the president of Lebanon Charles Debbas.¹⁹

Oliver felt a sense of responsibility as a British citizen and a Quaker to alleviate the distress of both Arabs and Jews and, consequently, founded the Lighthouse of the East magazine in 1936. Written exclusively in Arabic, its ambition was to provide a succession of articles on leading questions regarding international relations. According to Oliver, it stood for peace, goodwill and friendship between nations, with the aim of showing the spirit of Jesus Christ and his principles to as many as possible. The magazine also reflected Oliver's personal stance towards abstinence from alcohol and kindness to animals. The Lighthouse had a readership in the thousands every week; the magazine was distributed internationally to West Africa, Brazil, North Africa and the United States and across the Middle East to Mosul, Kirkurk, Jedda and Baghdad, Amman, Transjordan, Haifa, Jaffa and Syria. It received support from Sir Arthur Grenfell Wauchope, the British administrator and High Commissioner for Palestine and Transjordan. Weekly copies were delivered to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the American University in Beirut, and high-profile subscribers included Wauchope, King Ghazi of Iraq, the ruler of Transjordan Abdullah I bin Hussain, and president of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Dr Leon Magnes.²⁰ The editor of the magazine was Abid Gharozui, a teacher at the Ras el-Metn orphanage who had previously taught at the American University in Beirut. Teachers in the orphanage also wrote for the magazine alongside Gharouzi and Oliver. A few of the older students translated articles from English magazines in what Oliver called a collective effort to support 'our paper (it belongs to us all)'.²¹

In 1934 Oliver and Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker who was headmaster of the Friends Boys School in Ramallah, travelled from Palestine to the London Yearly Meeting to discuss the growing tensions in the area. After multiple discussions with Quakers, the colonial minister at Whitehall and members of parliament, Totah bitterly concluded: 'we accomplished nothing. England, including the English Quakers, were so sympathetic with the Zionists viewpoint, that our visit made no impression.'²² The failure of Totah and Oliver to make an impression was a catalyst for their development of the Palestine Watching

18 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, Efforts on Behalf of Peace between Arabs and Jews.

19 Unknown, *Daniel Oliver Biography*, p. 2.

20 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 1937—the Lighthouse of the East.

21 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, November 1937.

22 Ricks, T. M., 'Khalil Totah: The Unknown Years', *Institute of Palestine Studies: Jerusalem Quarterly* 34 (2008), pp. 51–77; p. 64.

Committee (PWC) a year later. In total, the committee met 33 times between 1935 and 1941 in what was a period of heightened Quaker activity in Palestine.²³ In other times of conflict radical political witness had proven an approach some Quakers favoured. However, the PWC and Oliver chose to regularly work with various foreign and domestic government branches in the pursuit of peace.²⁴ At the start of the Arab Revolt Oliver was a driving force behind Quaker opinions concerning the Mandate owing to his decades of experience and connections with high-ranking officials in the region. This was illustrated when, in an article published in the *Friend* magazine, the PWC cited a telegram from him stating that Jewish immigration should be temporarily suspended and that a 'gesture of goodwill' from Jews towards Arabs was needed for reconciliation to begin.²⁵ Oliver reiterated the responsibility he believed British people, including Quakers, held for developing peace in the region.

The PWC, during the early stages of the Arab Revolt, was in constant communication with senior government officials, enabled by one of its members, the Labour politician and Methodist Walther H. Ayles.²⁶ Ayles worked alongside the parliamentary committee of the British Commonwealth Peace Federation (BCPF) to ask questions in parliament on behalf of the PWC.²⁷ On 15 October 1936 13 members of the PWC, bar Ayles and Oliver, sent a signed letter to the British prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, stating that, to maintain authority, the government needed to acknowledge its mistakes.²⁸ The PWC recognised the doubts among Arabs and Jews regarding the honesty of the government's intentions in Palestine. The plethora of documents produced during the Arab Revolt illustrated how the PWC made a substantial effort as a pressure group to encourage government officials to appreciate different points of view, especially those of Arabs.

In the summer of 1936 Oliver and Ayles exchanged several telegrams, with Oliver stressing to Ayles that if the government temporarily suspended Jewish immigration into Palestine the Arabs would be willing to negotiate a peaceful settlement.²⁹ Oliver described how he spent five days meeting Arab and British leaders in Nablus, Jaffa and Jerusalem. He had detailed discussions with Arthur

23 London, The Friends House Library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637.5, Palestine Watching Committee Minutes 1941.

24 Abbott, M. P., Chijioko, M. E., Dandelion, P. and Oliver-Jr, J. W., *Historical Dictionary of the Friends (Quakers)*, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2nd edn, 2012, p. xi.

25 Unknown, 'Palestine', *The Friend* 94 (1936), pp. 382–83.

26 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637.4, Palestine Watching Committee Members List.

27 Backhouse, L. B., 'Palestine Watching Committee Report to Yearly Meeting', *Yearly Meeting Proceedings* (1935), pp. 212–13.

28 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 511.2.10, Palestine Watching Committee Statement.

29 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 511.2.10, Summary of Negotiations in Regard to Palestine.

Wauchope, prominent Arab leaders such as the Emir of Transjordan, Amir Abdallah, and the head of Arab nationalist forces in Palestine, Fawzi al-Qawukji.³⁰ His communication with Ayles emphatically stated that unless the immigration question was handled immediately there would be no peace for the foreseeable future.³¹ As a result of his actions Oliver found himself, at least in the eyes of government officials such as Ayles, regarded as a legitimate representative of the Arab voice. In September Ayles contacted the secretary of state for the colonies, William Ormsby-Gore, to request that Oliver's suggested temporary suspension of Jewish immigration be approved by the government; however, this was rejected as the government did not want to concede to Arab pressure or oppose the Balfour Declaration.³² Ormsby-Gore addressed the House of Commons on 5 November, stating that a suspension of immigration was not justifiable on economic grounds.³³ This rejection marked a change in tone from Ayles, who reminded Oliver and the PWC in December that the government never promised to suspend Jewish immigration into Palestine.³⁴

On 25 January 1937 a letter written by Ayles demonstrated a clear example of Quakers actively competing with one another. Ayles was swayed by a letter from Heinz Kappes, a German Quaker and teacher in Jerusalem, describing it as 'much more important' than Oliver's, with Ayles being impressed by the 'alternative' policy suggested by Kappes.³⁵ The specific letter that Ayles received has not survived, but in an article Kappes published in the *Friend*, as well as several letters and a short memoir, Kappes supported Jewish immigration into Palestine and the idea of a binational state, or one-state solution.³⁶ Though the PWC supported Oliver's view regarding Jewish immigration it was Kappes' openness towards Jewish immigration that suited the government, meaning he won the battle of

30 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 22 September 1936; The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, November 1937; The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 17 October 1936.

31 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 17 October 1936.

32 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 511.2.10, Ayles Correspondence.

33 House of Commons, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report* (5 November 1936, 317, col. 251–52), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1936-11-05/debates/e6281eef-337f-4f01-98d6-07026a97e4e3/JewishImmigration> [accessed 03/01/20].

34 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 511.2.1, British Commonwealth Peace Federation Correspondence, 30 December 1936.

35 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 511.2.1, British Commonwealth Peace Federation Correspondence, 25 January 1937.

36 Kappes, H., 'War or Peace in Palestine', *The Friend* 96 (1938), pp. 879–80; London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637.6, Kappes Correspondence, 25 June 1936; Kappes, H., *Led by the Spirit: my life and work, 1936–1948*, London: The Friends House Library, 1993.

influence over Ayles. As a result, and somewhat ironically, the PWC and Oliver saw their efforts scuppered partly through the actions of a fellow Quaker.

Undermined by Kappes but undeterred in his efforts, Oliver soon pressed the Peel Commission to recognise the grievances of the Arab people. Led by Lord Peel, the Commission was an investigation to determine the causes of the conflict and propose viable solutions. Oliver stressed the importance of Arab recognition by stating if the government did not recognise their complaints then 'dark stormy days [are] ahead of us'.³⁷ Oliver sent a letter to his contacts in the Arab and Jewish press pleading with Arab militias to cease their violent methods, stating that the murders and highway robberies were carried out by a small band of criminals and that the Arab Higher Committee, including leading Arabs, completely disapproved of these tactics.³⁸ Adamant in his belief in the nobility of Arabs, Oliver travelled from Damascus to Baghdad in search of the Arab Revolt's military leader Fawzi al-Qawukji, proclaiming that he trusted al-Qawukji and his supporters with his life and seeking to show them the Quaker point of view.³⁹ An overnight journey to Kirkuk allowed Oliver to finally meet al-Qawukji. Lauded by his supporters, al-Qawukji had been responsible for the revolt in Syria against the French Mandate the previous decade.⁴⁰ During a five-hour discussion al-Qawukji told Oliver, 'you English will never understand the Eastern mind'. Oliver immediately told him to stop, telling him that he knew the Arabs before al-Qawukji was even born and to 'remember you are speaking to a Scotch Arab'.⁴¹ Oliver's self-description as a 'Scotch' (Scottish) Arab and confidence in his authority befitted a man who saw himself as a legitimate representative of the Arab cause who could achieve peace, so much so that, prior to attending a peace conference in London, he met a journalist in a West End hotel wearing a gold-embroidered cloak, a gift given to him by King Ibn Saud Hedjaz, the founder and first monarch of Saudi Arabia.⁴² His confidence in his authority as an Arab spokesman was matched by his belief in the Mandate and British officials. Oliver stressed the importance of the Commission in several letters.⁴³ He sent

37 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 4 November 1936.

38 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Olivier Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 3 March 1937.

39 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 10 March 1937.

40 Pedersen, *The Guardians*, p. 374.

41 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 10 March 1937.

42 Gordon, J. H., '50 Years among Arabs', *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (16 February 1939).

43 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 17 October 1936; The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 4 November 1936; London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 511.2.1, Daniel Oliver Correspondence, 18 January 1937.

his final report through the PWC to the Commission on 30 March 1937, having done his utmost to persuade the Commission to limit Jewish immigration and provide more support for the Arabs.⁴⁴ However, when the Commission concluded that Palestine needed to be divided into two separate states both Oliver and other likeminded Quakers were disappointed by the recommendation. For Oliver, the partition plan would only generate more unrest among the Arabs and destabilise the region further. 'Great Britain cannot compel the Arabs to accept the Partition of Palestine. This simply cannot be carried out.'⁴⁵ Oliver referred to a comment made by his friend, the British diplomat Sir Andrew MacFadyean, who compared the partition to a surgeon cutting a patient into three parts with one part still kept by the surgeon.⁴⁶ This result indicated that Oliver's influence with government officials had waned; his conflicting ideals had seen him become an outsider.

On 31 July 1938 Oliver began a journey that friends advised him against, to once again visit the Arab revolutionary stronghold. He met his Arab contacts to ask for a meeting to be arranged, criticising some for lacking the courage to support him. Oliver was granted permission and after a journey involving a combination of car and horse, over rugged terrain, he eventually arrived at his destination.⁴⁷

I come to you, a Scotchman, a messenger of peace and friendship and goodwill, and I want you to believe, no matter how contrary appearances may be, that the British people love the Arabs, and we want that friendship that has existed for hundreds of years to continue. The distressing circumstances of the present time will pass, but the British people are your friends.⁴⁸

Oliver claimed that the following twenty-four hours of peace were as a direct result of these actions of an 'old Quaker', by which he meant himself.⁴⁹ His individual endeavours to demonstrate that the British public cared for Arabs was matched by the PWC several months later. In January 1939 the PWC published a memorandum signed by 16 British Quakers, Oliver excluding, entitled 'Settlement for Palestine'. The memo recognised that the repressive actions of the British military had made the situation worse and acknowledged the flaws in the approach of the government. The PWC compared the conflict in Palestine to

44 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637.6, Palestine Watching Committee Report to Yearly Meeting, 30 March 1937.

45 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, November 1937.

46 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, November 1937.

47 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 6 August 1938.

48 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 6 August 1938.

49 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 6 August 1938.

similar incidents of colonial unrest, such as in Ireland. Its members argued that repressive force applied before a just policy had been implemented only served to worsen the situation. 'For this reason we believe that His Majesty's Government have been wrong in insisting on order first and a solution afterwards.'⁵⁰

A nine-point dossier was included within the memo, which was sent to Malcolm MacDonald, the secretary of state for the colonies, as well as Arab and Jewish delegates in London.⁵¹ The memo stated that the PWC believed a 'generous, practical and dramatic gesture to the Arabs' was required to create peace.⁵² The partition of Palestine into states should be abandoned and, while sympathetic to the Zionist vision, the PWC could not 'envisage the fulfilment of the full Zionist programme in so small an area as the present confines of Palestine'.⁵³ British Quakers in this period were heavily involved in developing and implementing the Kindertransport, which involved bringing ten thousand Jewish children from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia to Britain in the period from December 1938 until the start of the Second World War.⁵⁴ While the Kindertransport, from a purely ethical standpoint, was a relatively simple decision, the PWC stance on limiting Jewish immigration was complicated. The memo showed the disparity between individual and collective visions. Its reservations over the impact of Zionism in Palestine were moderate compared with that expressed by some PWC members in articles in the *Friend*, which expressed deep concern over the legitimacy of the Zionist Movement.⁵⁵

The memo stressed how the 'spectacle of a great imperial power effecting such a settlement would have a tonic of influence on the self-respect of the British people'.⁵⁶ This comment regarding the 'self-respect' of British people suggested that PWC members felt a sense of collective guilt owing to the actions of the government. Arab-Christian communities avoided severe punishment from British forces often due to their religious preference, while Arab-Muslim villages were punished because they were assumed, through racial profiling, to have either been pro-rebel or, owing to their location near to a recent incident, somehow complicit in the revolt.⁵⁷ The failures of the government to find a peaceful solution

50 Albright, W. A. et al., 'Palestine Watching Committee: Settlement for Palestine', *The Friend* 97 (1939), pp. 49–50; p. 49.

51 Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637.6, Kappes Correspondence, 25 June 1936; London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 511.2.4, Malcolm Macdonald Correspondence.

52 Albright et al., 'Palestine Watching Committee: Settlement for Palestine', p. 50.

53 Albright et al., 'Palestine Watching Committee: Settlement for Palestine', p. 50.

54 Holmes, R., 'British Quakers and the Rescue of Jewish Refugees', *Association of Jewish Refugees* 11 (June 2011), p. 5.

55 Mauger, P., 'Jews in Palestine', *The Friend* 94 (1936), pp. 784–85; Pumphrey, M. E., 'Threefold Task in Palestine', *The Friend* 95 (1937), pp. 627–28.

56 Albright et al., 'Palestine Watching Committee: Settlement for Palestine', p. 49.

57 Haiduc-Dale, N., *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine*, Edinburgh Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 150–55.

to the revolt and sympathy for Arabs' anti-colonial mentality were dominant themes. The violence was deemed a fault of the government and against Quaker pacifist values, but the forceful actions of Arabs was often interpreted as justifiable owing to the government's failure to recognise Arab grievances. Thus, the Peace Testimony in this particular context was not an ethically fixed methodology but was widely open to interpretation according to circumstance.

Disagreement with the PWC and Individual Endeavours

Despite co-founding the PWC, Oliver was repeatedly at odds with its members regarding the conduct of British forces in the region. In the letter sent to Ayles on 17 October 1936, Oliver described visiting a prison in Acre where he was struck by how happy prisoners were and the affectionate way they greeted the governor of the prison, Major Worsley.⁵⁸ Oliver also published an article in the *Friend* on 21 July 1939 entitled 'Palestine and the British police', in which he vehemently argued that accusations of torture of prisoners of war by British police officers were categorically false. 'Is it possible that men in England who are honourable and upright can become fiends when they come to Palestine? I do not believe it, not a word of it.'⁵⁹ Oliver's confidence in the virtue of Englishmen demonstrated his patriotism and belief in the perceived values of people from the UK. To him, honour was such a key personal characteristic within every Englishman that it was not possible for them to behave so barbarically. Upon visiting a concentration camp holding Palestinian prisoners of war, he stated that none of the prisoners complained of ill-treatment and that they spoke kindly of the officer in charge. He defended the British police by concluding:

From my personal observation and knowledge resulting from many visits to Palestine, I am sure that the atrocity stories said to be committed in camps and prisons are not true This charge cannot be believed by any fair-minded person because it is so contrary to the well-known characteristics of the ordinary Britisher who is far too good a sportsman to hit his enemy when he is down.⁶⁰

Oliver believed that the British police were faultless regarding conduct and principles; as a result, this severely hampered his judgement when observing crimes committed against Arabs, and thus the accuracy of his article. When Palestinian prisoners of war told Oliver how well they were treated he was happy to accept their comments because it validated his belief that the 'ordinary Britisher' had too much personal integrity to treat a prisoner badly. Conversely, as soon as complaints were made regarding the conduct of British soldiers he was unwilling to consider that the accusations might be accurate. His article,

58 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 17 October 1936.

59 Oliver, D., 'Palestine and the British Police', *The Friend* 97 (1939), p. 618.

60 Oliver, 'Palestine and the British Police', p. 618.

despite being published in July 1939—almost seven months after the PWC issued a collective statement recognising the use of excessive force by British forces—revealed that he repudiated any acknowledgement of wrongdoing by the British police in Palestine. Despite co-founding the PWC and having influence over its policies, he was not a signatory on the PWC letter sent to Stanley Baldwin or the ‘Settlement for Palestine’ memo. This suggests that he did not agree with the PWC over the conduct of British forces in the region, remaining steadfast in his belief that they acted with the utmost integrity.

While famous travellers such as Lawrence and Gertrude Bell etched their names into British colonial history, the Olivers’ endeavours, by comparison, went unnoticed, even among Quakers. Nonetheless, Oliver continued his efforts, with Emily ‘unwavering’ in her support.⁶¹ The Ras el-Metn orphanage has not appeared frequently in Quaker texts, yet the near 50 years’ worth of education and nurturing that Daniel and Emily Oliver accomplished was a remarkable feat. Their endeavours produced young men who would go on to hold key positions in government and industry. Oliver proudly stated, ‘I have never once been asked for a recommendation for any of our boys. Having been in the orphanage gets them jobs right away.’⁶² The couple received respite at the beginning of the Second World War, which initially had a positive impact in the region, with the crisis in Europe forcing Arabs and Jews to be more tolerant of each other in the short term.⁶³ However, the British government had not resolved the longstanding issue of Jewish immigration and continued its stranglehold on Arab educational affairs, providing just enough financial support to suppress any nationalist revolution and its threat to colonial rule.⁶⁴ This factor, combined with the increasing desperation of Jews trying to migrate to Palestine, meant that the government continued to face Arab resentment over its rule in Palestine. Oliver remained resolute: “‘We carry on’ and cling to the hope that there is [a] brighter tomorrow coming.’⁶⁵

Once the Second World War began the PWC greatly reduced its activities and disbanded in 1941.⁶⁶ Oliver did not mention the disbandment in his letters,

61 Brengle, K., *Happy Anniversary, Daniel & Emily Oliver*, Massachusetts 2016, <https://generationsofnomads.com/2016/09/19/happy-anniversary-daniel-and-emily-oliver/> [accessed 29/06/20].

62 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 6 November 1944, p. 2.

63 London, The Friends House library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637.5, Arab–Jewish Relations, September 1941.

64 Tibawi, A. L., *Arab Education: a study of three decades of British education*, London: Luzac & Company, 1956, pp. 178–79; Tibawi, A. L., *Islamic Education: its traditions and modernization into the Arab national systems*, London: Headley Brothers, 1972, pp. 103–04.

65 London, Friends House Library, Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 551.2.1, Daniel Oliver Correspondance April 1943.

66 Backhouse, L. B., ‘Palestine Watching Committee Report to Yearly Meeting’, *Yearly Meeting Proceedings* (1941), pp. 132–35; p. 135.

but expressed frustration with both the PWC and British Friends' lack of funding for the Lighthouse magazine.⁶⁷ Much of the philanthropic backing for the orphanage came from the Friends community in Philadelphia.⁶⁸ This lack of financial support indicated that the Olivers, though sharing the collective Quaker long-term ambition to bring quality education to the region, maintained a significant amount of autonomy free from oversight. In 1944 the Lighthouse was about to close owing to financial difficulties, but was eventually purchased by two wealthy Arab businessmen. Oliver stated that the paper could have made more money by advocating certain political policies but that it was unthinkable to lower the standard. He was staunch in his principles, as was reflected in the orphanage motto: 'The difficult things can be done right away, the impossible takes a little longer'.⁶⁹ Oliver and Friends would need to maintain this attitude once the Second World War ended. While many people across the world looked forward to better days, Palestine was torn by further conflict.

There were several events in 1947 that proved pivotal, regarding not only the Mandate but also the history of the British Empire. India declared independence, while Britain began to reel from a period of unprecedented economic austerity.⁷⁰ This culminated in the announcement by the government of the abandonment of the Mandate and Britain's exit from Palestine. Henry J. Turtle, a teacher at the nearby Quaker-run Brummana school in Lebanon, described how Oliver, during this period, earned the trust of Arab leaders and large tribes such as the Bedouin, and also became much respected by prominent Jewish leaders such as Moshe Sharrett, the future prime minister of Israel.⁷¹ He drove to Transjordan to meet the king of Jordan, Abdullah I bin al-Hussein, to obtain a permit allowing him to be a correspondent when visiting Jewish refugee camps in Cyprus, having previously told British Quakers to contact their local MPs because Christian conscience demanded that Jews be helped.⁷² Oliver's travels were part of a last-ditch peacebuilding mission primarily focussed on understanding the Jewish perspective, stating that the 'ideal of understanding and peace between Arabs and

67 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 22 September 1936; The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 6 November 1944.

68 Brengle, K., 'Generation of Nomads Contact' (email to Alexis Constantinou, 7 August 2020).

69 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 6 November 1944.

70 Louis, W. R., *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945–1951: Arab nationalism, the United States, and postwar imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 477.

71 Turtle, H. J., *Quaker Service in the Middle East: Brummana High School*, London: Friends Service Council, 1975, p. 67.

72 Jowitt, L., *Daniel Oliver and Emily, His Wife*, London: London Yearly Meeting. Home Service Committee, 1955, p. 33; Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, July 1938.

Jews must be pursued by appealing to the best minds and thoughts among the two peoples. That is what we Quakers stand for.⁷³

Oliver described how, on his travels, his vehicle ‘had our British flag pasted inside the windshield—that flag always gives me a feeling of courage and assurance, because it stands in my mind for the highest and best things amongst nations.’⁷⁴ During a visit to Jerusalem he faced severe criticism because of his British nationality and the content of his arguments. Jewish hostility towards the British government had increased since the 1939 White Paper, which reduced Jewish immigration to seventy-five thousand over the following five years as well as placing restrictions on the transfer of Arab-owned property to Jewish owners.⁷⁵ This resulted in several acts of terrorism in the region, none more notorious than the King David Hotel bombing by the Irgun paramilitary group the previous year. The attack led to the deaths of 91 people, mostly British civilians, as the hotel acted as the central hub for the Mandate’s administration.⁷⁶ Oliver met representatives of Jewish militias and pleaded for the terrorism to cease, claiming that it was an act of madness. The response received was robust, with a militia spokesman stating that discussions had gone on for years without any success but their actions had now brought the Mandate to its knees, forcing the government to seek assistance from the United Nations, which eventually led to the recognition of Israel on 14 May 1948.⁷⁷ Oliver’s attempts to engage in peacebuilding negotiations fell on deaf ears owing to his nationality and the substance of his arguments. He refuted claims that Britain and its citizens were prospering as a result of the divide and rule principle, which was an accusation previously backed by Heinz Kappes.⁷⁸ Oliver described his anger at the militias’ beliefs that British imperialism was at play: ‘the suggestion of divide and rule I resent very much. I do not believe it for a moment. ... I did my best to clear that up, and I am going to Palestine again to tour all the colonies to try to remove this poisonous idea.’⁷⁹ His actions during the final years of the Mandate to bring opposing sides together through reconciliation were in keeping with Quaker spiritual values. However, his refusal to acknowledge criticism of the Mandate’s impact on the region demonstrated how his allegiance to the Mandate hurt his ability to communicate with those he sought to help. This ultimately damaged his attempts to stop the violence and work towards peace.

73 London, The Friends House Library, The Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637/8, Daniel Oliver Correspondance 3 March 1944.

74 Haverford, Haverford College Library The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 23 May 1949.

75 Segev, T., *One Palestine Complete*, London: Abacus, 2001, p. 440.

76 Sherman, A. J., *Mandate Days*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1997, p. 180.

77 Oliver, D., ‘Reconciliation in Palestine’, *The Friend* 105 (1947), pp. 621–23; p. 622.

78 Lucy Backhouse Papers, 1918–1952, TEMP MSS 637.6, Kappes Correspondence, 25 June 1936.

79 Oliver, ‘Reconciliation in Palestine’, p. 622.

British Quakers, at least officially as a collective, appeared to distance themselves from the pro- and anti-Zionist stances that were dividing British missionary groups in the region. Anglican clergymen and Christian evangelicals were predominantly opposed to Zionism but Church of Scotland missionaries, like the Quakers, adopted a strict neutral position over the issue, at least publicly.⁸⁰ The post-war years also saw Christian theology begin to recognise 'spiritual Israel', with the supersessionist doctrine being critically examined as part of a philo-Semitic turn by Protestant churches worldwide.⁸¹ The other academic institutions led by Quakers, such as the Friends' schools in Ramallah and Brummana, continued their educational efforts, but communications between themselves and the Ras el-Metn orphanage were rare. The PWC returned in 1945 with the aim of being involved in reconciliatory efforts, but their activity was significantly reduced; they did not contact government officials and only a few despondent accounts from the committee's clerks were published in the *Friend*.⁸² By the beginning of 1948 members of the committee described how little they were able to achieve, with some members even questioning the purpose of the committee.⁸³ In addition to the PWC withdrawal, Oliver expressed his disappointment towards the lack of haste shown by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), stating that he wished they acted sooner before calamity struck and nations fell off the precipice.⁸⁴ Oliver continued to argue for the Mandate to remain in control as a means of keeping the peace. However, he did finally concede that the government had made mistakes: 'Politics have done their best or their worst. A situation has been produced which is, at the moment, utterly beyond control [...] my heart is as heavy as lead.'⁸⁵ Until the very end, he held the government in the highest regard and, despite his absolute loyalty, conceded that the bitterness between all sides created an almost untenable situation.⁸⁶ The collapse of the Mandate and further conflict between Arabs and Jews meant that his peacebuilding endeavours were unsuccessful. This alone would have been a painful experience for Oliver, but in the process of continually defending the government also isolated him from his fellow Quakers, many of whom no longer focussed on the Mandate maintaining its authority.

80 Cohen, G. D., 'Elusive Neutrality: Christian humanitarianism and the question of Palestine, 1948–1967', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 5 (2014), pp. 183–210; p. 191.

81 Cohen, 'Elusive Neutrality', pp. 185–92.

82 Backhouse, L. B., 'The Crisis in Palestine', *The Friend* 104 (1946), pp. 718–19; Pumphrey, M. E., 'Friends and the Palestine Question', *The Friend* 104 (1947), p. 386.

83 Pumphrey, M. E., 'Palestine Watching Committee Report to the Meeting for Sufferings', *Yearly Meeting Proceedings* (1948), p. 101.

84 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, Efforts on Behalf of Peace between Arabs and Jews.

85 Oliver, D., 'Call to Prayer for Palestine', *The Friend* 106 (1948), pp. 94–96; p. 94.

86 Haverford, Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 14 July 1948.

Conclusion

Daniel Oliver's co-founding of the PWC was an attempt of international significance to bring greater Quaker involvement into the region. However, the PWC and Oliver appeared to have strained relations approaching the end of the Arab Revolt. A man of strict discipline who lived very abstemiously, he was a firm believer in providence and his direct and, at times, blunt approach was built upon a desire to put human needs first.⁸⁷ The Quaker faith as well as patriotism fuelled this desire to create peace in the Middle East. His ultimate failure to do so left him separated from his fellow Quakers in the PWC, who themselves struggled to find common ground regarding issues such as Jewish immigration and Zionism. Despite several setbacks in his attempts at reconciliation, Oliver demonstrated a remarkable propensity to persist and continued working towards peace. He remained not only loyal to Britain but steadfast in his belief that it was the best a nation could offer both morally and intellectually. In addition to being the official Quaker representative in the Middle East, he also saw himself as a spokesman for Britain. His ties to senior British, Arab and Jewish officials gave him opportunities to work towards peace that few others had. At times he was as much a British diplomat as a Quaker.

Quakerism has always placed a large focus on the individual. Oliver's individuality at times created a divide between himself and the PWC, especially when discussing the conduct of British forces. The difficulty of finding parity between faith and patriotism, collective vision and individual action created many challenges. Yet, regardless of the issue at hand, Oliver always followed his inner spirit in the pursuit of peace, even while other Quakers were resigned to the Mandate's demise and aware that peace was no longer achievable. He travelled to areas knowingly putting his life in danger well into his late 70s and negotiated with people from all sides, some of whom history has judged as heroes, others as villains. For better or for worse, his conviction allowed him to embark on a journey that few experienced or could have endured.

Author Details

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⁸⁷ Haverford Haverford College Library, The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 6 July 1945; The Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage Papers, 1907–1960, Collection 1134, 20 January 1948; Bolan, 'My Only Enemy Is Daniel Oliver', p. 10.

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