

Book Reviews

Thomas D. Hamm, *Liberal Quakerism in America in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1790–1920* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 97. ISBN 9789004430723. Paperback, €96.00.

Thomas Hamm is the foremost scholar of nineteenth-century Quakerism in north America and since his seminal publication on Orthodox Quakerism in 1988 (*Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends 1800–1907*, Indiana University Press) scholars have long awaited the Hicksite counterpart. This journal has played its part in publishing shorter pieces by Hamm on the Hicksites and his work will also appear in the new Penn State Press volume on the nineteenth century as part of their 'New History of Quakerism' series. However, there has been no book-length coverage of 'the other branch'. This book, while necessarily short, to fit into the format of the Brill series on 'Research Perspectives in Quaker Studies', begins to meet the scholarly yearning. I, for one, still hope for longer work.

The thesis of the volume is that a self-conscious Liberal Quakerism emerged in North America between 1790 and 1920. Hamm defines Liberal Quakerism around three key features: liberty of conscience; doubts about orthodox beliefs and the divinity of Christ; and a sense of connection and consistency with early Friends. This tripartite definition allows Hamm to look to the ultra-quietism of Abraham Shackleton and Hannah Barnard, both disowned at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as the New Lights, as proto-liberals. Elias Hicks can appear as a liberal in this definition and Hamm quotes William Poole in 1825 extolling Thomas Wetherald as a 'fearless advocate of liberal doctrines'. Hamm goes on to chart the schisms of the Progressives, as well as the controversy created between the political radicalism of Owenism and fellow Hicksite William Gibbons, showing the dangers of placing 'liberty of conscience' so centrally within religious identification. By 1920, Hicksite yearly meetings are being described as 'liberal' by contemporaries, the label becoming increasingly used after 1860. The volume continues by illustrating how the part of the Gurneyite branch of the Quaker world ended up with a liberal or modernist sensibility reacting initially against holiness revivalism and later evangelical fundamentalism. The marginalisation

of renewal Gurneyites such as Joel and Hannah Bean consolidated a modernist sentiment among some Friends that would play out both within Five Years Meeting as well as, in time, unaffiliated yearly meetings such as Pacific.

Thomas Hamm is probably without equal within Quaker studies presently in his ability to make historical narrative exciting, accessible and readable. Within any one section of this book, the accounts are compelling and beautifully composed. However, the very flourish of the unfolding dramas conceals the lack of counter-evidence that would strengthen Hamm's thesis. For example, Hamm takes the Poole quote mentioned above and claims that it signifies that by 1825 "'liberal' described an outlook and body of values that many Friends wanted to affirm'. One quotation from one writer does not substantiate such a claim. Argument requires evidence and counter-evidence prior to a conclusion and the counter-evidence is often missing. My other reservation is over how Hamm defines 'Liberal'. As stated above, this threefold definition allows him to navigate the challenges to the growth of a coherent Liberal Quakerism across the long nineteenth century, but it doesn't sit so easily in my opinion with the modernist elements that come to the fore at the end of that period and which separate revival and renewal Quakerism and Liberal from Conservative unprogrammed traditions. However, if Hamm had used modernism as his basis for a definition of Liberal, it would have cut out much of the earlier part of the century. This is not a critique of Hamm but more a comment on the lack of scholarly consensus about how Liberal Quakerism is best characterised and defined. It may be that, ultimately, liberty of conscience, doubts about orthodox beliefs and the divinity of Christ and a sense of connection and consistency with early Friends prove to be a more useable and enduring definition for a branch of Quakerism that continues to mutate, rather than tying it to the modernist and rationalist thought that so acted as a catalyst for it at the end of the nineteenth century (allowing Friends such as Rufus Jones to comfortably straddle FUM and FGC sensibilities). In this volume, however, I didn't feel the two definitional bases of Liberal Quakerism were fully resolved but rather that each was used to its own advantage. Was liberty of conscience really a central plank of Gurneyite Liberalism? That was not clear to me: maybe it just needed the author to link the outcomes of modernist thinking more explicitly to his original definition.

None of these reservations deter me from fully recommending this volume. It starts to fill a gap in the historiography with the advantage of Hamm's skilful writing and formidable knowledge of so many of the primary sources of the period. Along the way, Hamm is full of wisdom and scholarship. For example, he illustrates well how the term 'inner Light' is in use by 1873 and should not be attributed just to the influence of Rufus Jones, as I have wrongly suggested in the past. Hamm's work also contributes most helpfully to better contextualising the origins of Liberal Quakerism and how it built on a variety of threads, rather than simply being of its time.

Pink Dandelion
University of Birmingham, UK

Chris Skidmore, *Quakers and their Meeting Houses* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), pp. 163 + illustrations. ISBN 978-1800857209. Hardback, £40.00.

Many people enjoy encounters with Quaker meeting houses when touring Britain and it is useful to have to hand a well-illustrated, portable guide for reference, especially since Friends' buildings present particular challenges to architectural historians. Quaker architecture often elicits emotional rather than intellectual responses: to the mid-century architectural historian Sir John Summerson, Friends' meeting houses were 'buildings of endearing simplicity', favourably contrasted with other nonconformist designs. Summerson was not alone: for Albert Richardson 'the atmosphere of complete detachment ... is even more convincing than outward display'.¹ These academic difficulties arise as a product of traditional architectural history's preoccupation with form: in this case—where there is little formally to analyse—it draws an appropriate blank. Much traditional architectural history is shaped by building survivals and by works of theory: Christopher Stell's comprehensive 1994 survey of nonconformist chapels and meeting houses suggests the density of remaining rural meeting houses evidences the sect's popularity among farmers, overlooking any intellectual and aesthetic considerations.² Moreover, early Friends' rejection of formal engagement with, or interest in, articulating architectural and aesthetic theory compounds efforts to describe and interpret builders' intentions. And, since early Quakers were driven to extreme simplicity, there cannot be an extensive discussion—as of, say, Anglican or Roman Catholic churches—of elaborate fittings, complex iconographical schemes or embellishment. There is, by design, a lot of nothing. But all of this is not to say that a distinctive Quaker aesthetic did not emerge; the very nothingness is the point, and these physical and scholarly *lacunæ* offer fertile ground for alternative approaches, considering the sensory and affective aspects of an ecclesiastical space that promoted the numinous aspects of spirituality.

Chris Skidmore *Quakers and their Meeting Houses* has consequently done a service for Historic England in compiling this neat volume. The book's origins lie in the Quaker Meeting Houses Heritage Project—part of the wider project on places of worship called 'Taking Stock'—that was jointly funded by Historic England and in this case Quakers in Britain. The project team surveyed 345 meeting houses nationally (including four in Scotland, four in Wales, but none in Northern Ireland) between 2014 and 2016 and it is these that form the subject matter of the present volume. Skidmore offers a welcome and long-overdue update of Hubert Lidbetter's *The Friends' Meeting House* (1961) and David Butler's *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (1999).³ The compendious nature of the latter makes it

1 Richardson, A., foreword to Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, York: William Sessions Ltd., The Ebor Press, 1961, p. xvi.

2 Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meetinghouses in the North of England*, London: HMSO, 1994, p. xxi

3 Lidbetter, *The Friends' Meeting House*; Butler, D., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, London: Friends' Historical Society, 1999.

too bulky to slip into a bag, unlike this book, which also compares favourably with Christopher Martin's *A Glimpse of Heaven*, which emerged from the same project and addressed Roman Catholic places of worship.⁴ Indeed, Skidmore's stated aim is to make the history of meeting houses widely accessible, and he achieves this with his attentive descriptions and lavish illustrations, comprising contemporary photographs and occasional drawn plans.

Additionally, Skidmore organises the material as an easy-to-navigate chronological survey from the mid seventeenth-century emergence of the Religious Society of Friends, right up to 2020. Divided into six short chapters, he traces the evolution of the Society and of building type and concludes with a short reflective essay on The Quaker Style. The chapters cover a wide geographical range across England, Scotland and Wales, and, though clearly indebted to Lidbetter and to Butler, focus on original and less familiar examples to complement those works. Of particular interest is discussion of the designs of Lidbetter himself, who, as an observant Friend and practising architect, was doubly qualified both to document and design meeting houses. The gazetteer of Listed Quaker buildings in the Appendix is accompanied by a very useful short glossary of architectural terms, and crucially a glossary of Friends' terminology that may be opaque to readers less familiar with the Society (pp. 144–50). These inclusions certainly further his ambition to be accessible.

The simplicity of Skidmore's method is both its strength and weakness. As suggested in my opening comments, the formalist approach derived from surveys, and common to much traditional architectural history, is insufficient here. For instance, detailing numerous inscriptions on buildings announcing 'Friends Meeting House' can be banal. And there are missed opportunities: an exploration of Friends' repeated use of sundials could foreground the Quakerly tradition of scientific engagement from the earliest days, for instance.

While Skidmore identifies Friends' enduring taste for functionality, design decisions often respond to broader requirements. William Alexander's rare volume *Notes on Fitting up Of Meeting Houses* (1820) offers useful insights into Friends' priorities. Relating the meeting houses to broader architectural debates and comparing with other building typologies would position them and highlight their significance in wider architectural history. International connections, which are flagged by Skidmore, might be fruitfully explored: for instance, buildings of Reformed Protestant worship of the Dutch Republic—of which some Quakers were aware—have a clear family relationship.

And, while Skidmore aims for accessibility, and Quaker theology is famously complex and seemingly contradictory, it nevertheless offers ways in which to understand tensions between the rejection of society and the acceptance of it, characterised by a desire to be *in* Society but not *of* it. Similarly, theological

4 Martin, C., *A Glimpse of Heaven: Catholic churches of England and Wales*, Swindon: English Heritage, 2006.

distinctions between *Inward* and *Outward* knowledge help frame discussions of almost plain interiors contrasted with vernacular exteriors. Perhaps Skidmore's rather old-fashioned approach is deliberately to confer greater accessibility? The social history passages contextualise, yet social concepts such as the construction of identity are key to addressing *why* early Quakers—who regarded all places as equally sacred and rejected 'steeple houses' (churches)—started to construct meeting houses. Social issues of gender and class play little part in Skidmore's articulation of the social character of most Friends and their activities. Finally, a misjudged (possibly editorial?) decision has positioned a reflective section after the chronological chapters, almost as a conclusion derived from all the building surveys.

None of this should detract from the important contribution of the book, however. It is a handsome companion to the Quakerly equivalent activity of 'Church Crawling'. The study on which it is based formed part of a project that supported listing and subsequent preservation of more important meeting houses.⁵ In terms of impact, therefore, it is admirable and satisfies its ambition to make meeting houses accessible in a quite literal way.

Ann-Marie Akehurst

Independent Art and Architectural Historian, RIBA Affiliate and
Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, UK

R. Melvin Keiser, *Seeds of Silence: Essays in Quaker Spirituality and Philosophical Theology* (Winchester: Christian Alternative Books, 2021), pp. 310. ISBN 978-1-78904-549-9. Paperback, £14.99; ebook, £7.99.

This collection of essays varies widely in audience, genre, style and date, with some material considerably more scholarly than other parts. Having been asked to review this book for an academic journal, I will focus on those essays I find to be of most interest to an academic audience, but readers should be aware that the collection also includes essays aimed at a general Quaker audience. There is some very important thinking in this volume, but it has not always been supported by careful editing: like many collections of essays it includes some repetition; material written some time ago has not been brought up to date; and there are a number of distracting typographical errors in the bibliography. The gathered essays are grouped into sections, and some brief introductory material is included. It is not always clear at what date a particular essay reached the form in which we find it here, but it is clear that the work spans at least from the 1990s to the 2010s.

The original contributions made by this book are in the areas of Quaker theology and philosophy. In particular, the insight into the nature of Quaker

5 'Taking Stock of Survey of Quaker Meeting Houses', *Architectural History Practice*, http://www.architecturalhistory.co.uk/news/item/case_studies/quaker-meeting-houses (accessed: 10 January 2022).

theology, with an emphasis on the foundation in shared silence and the process of working to speak about the divine based on experience, is vital and very clearly articulated here. Two essays under the heading *The What, How and Why of Quaker Theology*, 'The Quaker Vision and the Doing of Theology' and 'Reflecting Theologically from the Gathered Meeting: The Nature and Origin of Quaker Theology', provide important discussion of these points. Related to this are interpretations of early Quaker writing with a focus on George Fox and Robert Barclay. From those interpretations, Keiser develops understandings of the New Creation and a relational, non-dualistic approach to paired terms such as inward/outward and body/mind which he can then deploy in modern theological work with regard to topics such as metaphorical religious language and the role of historical scholarship in a faith community. Keiser's steady and logical writing enables deep and careful considerations of his material.

The chief weakness of this book from the point of view of the academic reader is the lack of engagement with more recent scholarship. There is an error sometimes seen in academic writing in which the author engages only with things written in the last twenty years and does not go back to the original texts; there is an equal and opposite error in which a focus on early and original texts does not leave room for recent insight and ignores the ongoing conversation. This book leans towards the second, a problem compounded by the varied dates of the essays. Where there is engagement with secondary literature, as in the essay 'Touched and Knit in the Life: Barclay's Relational Theology Beyond Cartesian Dualism', it is often older material—for example, that essay describes a 1998 article by Hugh Pyper as 'the most recent consideration of Barclay's dualism' (p. 105). Besides Michael Birkel's work on Barclay, this misses Laura Rediehs's work on Quaker epistemology, which considers Barclay in detail and would also be usefully brought into discussion with many of Keiser's points about how Quaker know theological things.¹ Similar points could be made about historical and biblical scholarship, Wittgensteinian and other philosophical schools and feminist and other liberation theologies—in all those fields, major contributions to the conversation are mentioned but not cited or passed over entirely in silence.

Keiser's work in this book achieves a number of useful things. He articulates ideas about both the content and the method of Quaker theology that deserve further attention. He engages with early Quaker writings in ways which are both rigorous and creative, finding resources for addressing new questions in a helpful way. He writes well and makes his points explicitly with technical terms where needed but never obfuscation—I sometimes wondered whether a claim was true, or whether I agreed, but I did not find myself re-reading a paragraph to work out what the claim *was*. It also left me hungry for more, especially for future writers

1 Rediehs, L., 'A Distinctive Quaker Theory of Knowledge: an expanded experiential empiricism', *Quaker Studies* 21/1 (2016), pp. 67–94.

to build on and improve what is here. I hope that, given that this book shows it is possible and interesting, more scholars will explore Quaker philosophy and theology in detail.

Rhiannon Grant
Woodbrooke, Centre for Research in Quaker Studies,
University of Birmingham, UK

Maria H. Kennedy, *Irish Quaker Hybrid Identities: Complex Identity in the Religious Society of Friends* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. viii + 98. ISBN 9789004415188. Paperback, €70.00.

Quakers in Ireland have seldom been the focus of sustained scholarly research. Maria Kennedy's book, *Irish Quaker Hybrid Identities*, goes some way towards addressing gaps in our knowledge about this small—but historically and socially significant—religious community.

In this concise book, Kennedy explores the origins and background of Quakerism in Ireland. The introductory chapter provides background on Irish Quakerism. It is followed by chapters on historical context, identity theory, Irish Quaker identity and the management of hybrid identities by Ireland Yearly Meeting, with a short concluding chapter that summarises the main findings and arguments. The island's history of ethno-political violence, reinforced by religious difference, has for centuries been a challenge to Quakers' peace witness. There are brief historical sections about such challenges, touching on Quakers' efforts to retain neutrality during the 1798 rebellion and the Great Famine—although more curious readers might be frustrated by a lack of references to historical studies.

Kennedy is primarily concerned with how the most recent period of violence, the Troubles in Northern Ireland (c. 1968–98), has impacted Quaker identities, witness and activism. Previous work such as *Coming from Silence: Quaker Peacebuilding Initiatives in Northern Ireland 1969–2007*, edited by Ann Le Mare and Felicity McCartney,¹ focused solely on Northern Ireland. Refreshingly, Kennedy takes an all-island approach, identifying island-wide tensions and differences within Ireland Yearly Meeting (IYM) that relate to the violence and sectarianism of the Troubles, among other issues.

Kennedy's arguments and conclusions are grounded in empirical data in the form of interviews with 15 Quakers across the island. The analysis of these interviews was informed by social identity theory, building on Jennifer Todd's pioneering work on the social construction of ethno-national and religious identities on the island.

1 Le Mare, A., and McCartney, F., (eds), *Coming from the Silence: Quaker peacebuilding initiatives in Northern Ireland 1969–2007*, York: Ebor Press, 2009.

In this, Kennedy's most valuable contribution is mapping the diversity within Irish Quakerism. In 2010 there were just 2,141 Quakers on the island (899 were part of Ulster Quarterly Meeting, which includes Northern Ireland). It might be expected that such a small community would be relatively homogeneous, but Kennedy identifies 22 identity labels within those 15 interviews alone. These identity labels are both political and theological and include Quaker (not Protestant), liberal, republican, culturally Catholic, evangelical and unionist, to name a few. Kennedy also constructs several Quaker identity matrices that capture these differences (pp. 38–43), including two dominant 'clusters': evangelical and liberal. Some of the most interesting passages come when Kennedy fleshes out these identities through case studies of two individuals: Peter—a 'birthright' evangelical Quaker living in Northern Ireland; and Sean—a Quaker from a Catholic background living in the Republic of Ireland.

Tensions between evangelicals and liberals are common across a range of Christian communities. Kennedy argues that within IYM these tensions are managed by prioritising 'relational unity' over political and theological agreement. This is no easy task in a community that operates via consensus decision-making. Kennedy found that differences have been managed by IYM meeting by devolving contentious issues to the local level, particularly matters related to the Troubles (p. 83); and efforts have been made to include Quakers of different perspectives on national-level committees. At the same time, Kennedy recognises that these strategies have their limitations, in that they may make IYM vulnerable to *de facto* disunity or detachment as local meetings diverge on issues such as same-sex marriage (p. 84). Furthermore, some Quakers reported feeling 'silenced' for the sake of maintaining relational unity (pp. 84, 88). As such, Kennedy challenges Susan Robson's claim,² one that Robson subsequently revised,³ that IYM is better at conflict management than British Yearly Meeting, arguing that the avoidance of conflict within IYM presents its own problems.

Even so, Kennedy draws an optimistic conclusion about Irish Quakerism's potential to contribute to identity transformation, both north and south, placing great value on their modelling of 'an alternative non-sectarian identity' (p. 92).

As recent scholarly studies of religion on the island have often overlooked Quakers, Kennedy's work is a timely reminder of their significance and a call to consider their inclusion in future research.

Gladys Ganiel
Queen's University Belfast, UK

2 Robson, S., 'Grasping the Nettle: conflict and the Quaker condition', in Dandelion, P., and Collins, P., (eds), *The Quaker Condition: the sociology of a liberal religion*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008, pp. 140–57.

3 Robson, S., *Living with Conflict: a challenge to the peace church*, Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2014.