

ABBOTT, Margery Post, CHIJOKE, Mary Ellen, DANDELION, Pink, and OLIVER, John William, Jr, *The A to Z of the Friends (Quakers)* (The A to Z Guide Series 18; Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), pp. xxx + 376. ISBN 0-8108-5611-5, Paper, \$40.00.

'If you don't know where to start, start with the encyclopaedia' runs the advice to the novice reference librarian, with the rider, 'assume that there is a specialised encyclopaedia dealing with the subject of your enquiry'. The appropriate level of review of this work, therefore, lies in whether it provides a good starting point for the non-specialist requiring a brief overview of aspects of Quakerism. Given the diversity of Friends' practices, even the experienced Quaker may find herself a 'non-specialist' for the purposes of this exercise, when dealing with Yearly Meetings other than her own. Similarly, even the weightiest Friend may value a short summary of some of our common phrases!

In fact, *The A to Z of the Friends (Quakers)* turns out to be a revised edition of the *Historical Dictionary of the Friends (Quakers)*, published in 2003. It is not clear quite how extensive that revision has been. If currency, while good, is a little vague, the scope of the work covering as it seems to do the full range of Quakerism's manifestation, is amazing. Given this, one small criticism occurs around the occasional mention of a committee or group without providing a context in terms of the branch of Quakerism within which it arises, or the extent to which it is an official committee of a Yearly Meeting, or a popular movement.

The introduction offers a summary essay on the Quaker movement. I would have to say that I find this a somewhat uneasy balance between giving that general overview and providing the necessary detail required to accommodate the range of Friends' opinions. In some ways, this is one essay that might better be written by an outsider. It also, perhaps, reflects the difficulty of knowing the audience for which such a work is written. The advantage of the dictionary format comes to the fore here in that, while we may not be clear about the particular axes the contributors have to grind, the absence of an overall thesis provides scope to incorporate treatments of topics that might be ignored by a work with a case to argue.

In summary, for libraries not already holding the *Historical Dictionary* and wanting a good starting point for enquiries about Quakerism, this is an excellent work.

Similarly, for individuals wanting an accessible, if unsystematic, overview of the Quaker movement, this has much to recommend it.

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