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# Finnegan's "Participating in the Knowledge Society: Researchers Beyond the University Walls" - Book Review

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FINNEGAN, Ruth (ed.), *Participating in the Knowledge Society: Researchers Beyond the University Walls* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), pp. xiv + 260. ISBN 1-4039-3946-2, Cloth, £60.

This book is on the periphery of those normally reviewed in *Quaker Studies*, having no mention of Quakers in either Table of Contents or Index. It is not, however, therefore irrelevant, for the relationship between amateur and professional is a common motif in Quaker research, where enthusiasts for local studies and family trees may rub shoulders with university historians and sociologists, all listed in the QSRA database and meeting up from time to time in Friends House Library and at Woodbrooke. Anyone engaged with this situation, in whatever capacity, will find it interesting to look at similar relationships in other fields of study.

The book focuses on British examples. Its first section is historical, and explores a number of curious byways, the amateur origins of British astronomical research in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, botany in the nineteenth century, the public lecture movement, the scientific output of missionaries, and the beginnings of industrial research between the two world wars. The second section, 'Outside and Across the Walls', looks at those types of research which depend on the work of non-professional researchers, sometimes in large numbers, but which relate to and sometimes are validated by professionals. Local and family history is an obvious example. Professional archaeologists need volunteer assistants. Much information relating to birds and the environment is collected by members of the British Trust for Ornithology, the data being then processed by professionals. There is a chapter on Mass-Observation and another on the work of think-tanks.

The third section, 'Openings and Challenges through the Web?', is presumably the area where most future development will lie. The first of these four chapters looks at the use of the internet for obtaining information about day-to-day matters, and the second describes the website *OpenDemocracy* and its function in encouraging political debate. Then there is a chapter on blogging, and its uses in obtaining and sharing information, and the final chapter in this section looks at the developing relation between traditional print publishing and the Internet, and what this may imply for the validating of research.

A short fourth section, 'Reflections: Are There Lessons for the Present?', is more specifically directed to higher educational professionals, dealing with the relationship between universities and the 'Knowledge Society', and discussing different forms of knowledge, their relative values, and the development of a possible 'knowledge ethic' to discriminate between and evaluate them.

The authors of the various chapters are a good and interesting mixture, if perhaps erring on the side of too many professional academics, and the editor should be congratulated on getting such a team together. I found the book informative and in parts fascinating, and I recommend it to others concerned with the professional/amateur divide.

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