

2005

Guest Editorial (Quaker Studies Vol. 9, issue 1)

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Recommended Citation

Allen, Richard C. (2005) "Guest Editorial (Quaker Studies Vol. 9, issue 1)," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 1.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol9/iss1/1>

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Over the course of the last three decades many successful conferences held in both Britain and America have pushed forward the remit of Quaker studies. These conferences have introduced many old and young scholars, and other interested parties, to a greater awareness of the Quakerism in society, both historically and in modern times. The Quaker Studies Research Association in Britain annually provides a stimulating weekend combining both its day conference and other activities associated with Woodbrooke College. The George Richardson lecture also has a high profile and has attracted a variety of interesting speakers. On the other side of the Atlantic the biennial and peripatetic Quaker Historians and Archivists Conference again affords an opportunity for Friends and non-Friends to share the wealth of their knowledge and engage in lively discussions. It has been a privilege to take part in both conferences and to hear many diverse and stimulating studies. At the Quaker Historians and Archivists Conference held at George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon, in June 2004 there was a good response from British participants, including two postgraduates (Simon Dixon and Gareth Shaw) and Brian Ward, an established academic at Florida University. To widen participation and attendance from European scholars I proposed convening the Sixteenth Biennial Conference in Britain in 2008. The business meeting accepted this suggestion and approved further discussions. Clearly this is an opportunity for collaboration between Quaker Studies Research Association and the Friends Historical Society. I would welcome the thoughts of members of these organisations as well as other interested participants (r.allen@unn.ac.uk).

The articles in this issue once again show the multi-disciplinary interest in Quaker studies. Several of the papers were presented to the Popular Culture and Religion Conferences held at Northumbria University in July 2001 and May 2002 and are the product of mature reflection. The chronological and geographical scope of this volume are impressive in that it explores Quaker literature from the seventeenth century to modern day appraisals of membership of the Religious Society of Friends; the articles are equally diverse covering Pennsylvania, Ireland, Britain and mainland Europe. A large range of themes is covered: Quaker versifiers; ministering men and women Friends; schism; emigrants and exiles; politics and philanthropy; and an assessment of Quakerism today. The book reviews also provide insights into current scholarly activity in the field of Quaker studies.

As I wrote in my last editorial (8,1) modern scholars of Quakerism ought

to raise new questions, be judicious about uncovering the past, and move away from the hagiographic mentality that has persisted. Clearly in this edition the authors have done just that. The volume begins with an absorbing investigation of Quaker versifiers by Rosemary Moore. This study offers more than a fleeting insight into the literary endeavours of John Perrot, William Bayly, Dorothy White, and others as it provides a carefully researched exploration of the causes behind verse publication in the mid-seventeenth century, the limited outpourings after 1663, and its relative value for an understanding of early Quakerism. Picking up on the theme of Quakerism in the seventeenth century Catie Gill provides a detailed examination of women ministers and the complex issues they had to contend with. It explores the challenge of Quaker women ministers to what Gill has called "the supposed legitimacy of their 'betters'" (p. 20) as well as the traditional male-dominated society of the period. She offers a carefully constructed argument and considers the attitude of co-religionists towards female prophets and preachers by drawing upon a rich array of published and unpublished material. In comparison to the article by Sheila Wright on nineteenth century women Friends provided in *Quaker Studies* 8,1, Gill's study exposes how Friends were divided between those welcoming the role of women ministers and those conservative members who sought to restrict the role of women in the Society.

As 2004 is the 350th anniversary of the introduction of the Quaker message into Wales it seems appropriate to include an article on Welsh Friends. Richard Allen offers the first in a series of insights into the world of the seventeenth century Welsh Quaker emigrants to Pennsylvania. As a preliminary study it examines the reasons for emigration and explores briefly the persecution of Friends in Wales, their patterns of settlement in Pennsylvania, some of the experiences and problems encountered by the emigrant population, and questions the argument that the whole of Wales participated in Penn's 'Holy Experiment'. In a similar vein Jeanne Henriette Louis' contribution takes us back to a time when persecution was widespread in France. She skilfully considers the struggles of the 'Desert' Society in the Cévennes Mountains in Languedoc during the late seventeenth century and the opening years of the eighteenth century. She examines who these people were and what they represented during this period of internal and bloody unrest in France. Towards the latter part of her study she investigates the connection between the exiled *Camisard* prophets in Britain and the Society of Friends and the Shaker movement before returning to the question of the society in eighteenth century France. It is an extremely provocative piece of work and, as Louis points out, more work on the origins of French Quakerism is still needed.

The schismatic White Quakers in Ireland are the subject of James Gregory's most recent work. He looks at the history of this mid-nineteenth century breakaway sect and their desire to return to a more conservative Quaker lifestyle. In Joshua Jacob (and Abigail Beale), as Gregory explains, 'the discontented found a leader' (p. 68), while in *Progress of Truth* they had a journal in which they could air their grievances. In this multi-layered and stimulating

study Gregory scrutinises the reception of the sect among Friends and non-members in Britain and Ireland, he helpfully examines the historiography of the period, and provides an analysis of the traditions of the White Quakers and their commercial enterprises. As he records, Jacob 'fascinated contemporaries' (p. 69) and this article will fascinate a modern audience.

The modern period of Quakerism is dominated by the Rowntrees, Cadburys, Gurneys, Peases and other important families. The work of Jonathan Davies and Mark Freeman, examining the attitude of the members of the Rowntree family to democratic and constitutional reform in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is therefore a welcome addition to our knowledge of Friends in the modern period. They have certainly subjected Joseph, Arnold and Seebom Rowntree to careful scrutiny and explore their involvement in the political and social issues of the age. Their analysis is both sympathetic and rigorous, while their comments on the Rowntree press, the community at New Earswick and educational settlements are challenging. I would concur with their assessment that the experiences and beliefs of these men 'reflect the conflicts that arose between Victorian paternalistic instinct... and the genuine desire to promote more widespread political citizenship.' (p. 110).

The final two articles review the current state of Quakerism. Bill Chadkirk explores the trends in membership from the 1960s onwards, and offers a gloomy forecast that an end-point could be as close as 2032. Using statistical data and recent scholarship he shows how the Society declined in the 1990s, and by observing adult-only membership he has been able to plot long-term trends more accurately. Charles Stroud's and Pink Dandelion's research note similarly investigates modern day membership trends and proposes that the potential cut-off date could be 2108. Providing two mathematical calculations they discuss this decline and highlight its acceleration during the last forty years. Openly critical of their own work, Stroud and Dandelion provide new assessments and point out that, unlike the mid-nineteenth century when Friends reversed the decline in membership by taking practical steps concerning endogamy and plainness, there are fewer options open today as the decline is 'voluntary rather than imposed' (p. 124). This depressing scenario has been an ever-present concern for Friends over time. The interesting question may well be: how will members now respond?

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Guest Editor