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VICTORIAN PHILANTHROPY AND THE ROWNTREES: THE JOSEPH ROWNTREE CHARITABLE TRUST

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of the establishment and early grant-making priorities of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, this article explores the development of Quaker philanthropy in Britain in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, especially in the context of the long-standing Quaker interest in adult education. It locates Joseph Rowntree's view of philanthropy in the wider contexts of the changing patterns of Victorian and Edwardian philanthropic theory and practice, the nineteenth-century growth of Quaker social concern, and the changing perceptions of the problem of poverty during Rowntree's lifetime. It argues that the motives underlying the establishment of the Charitable Trust were predicated on an essentially Victorian conception of the role of the philanthropist, modified by Rowntree's own experience of the changes within the Society of Friends during the nineteenth century.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

In 1904 the York cocoa manufacturer and Quaker Joseph Rowntree set aside about half of his personal wealth into three Trusts to be administered by members of his family in the interests of the community, each directed to specific objectives. The Joseph Rowntree Village Trust,[1] intended to be permanent, was established to oversee the construction and administration of Rowntree's model housing project at New Earswick, just outside York; and

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1.   On the Village Trust see [Lewis E. Waddilove], *One Man's Vision: The Story of the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954).

the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust, which did not have charitable status, was designed to support overtly political projects, especially the purchase of newspapers, and was to last initially for a period of 35 years. The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT), the smallest of the three in terms of assets and also with a 35-year lifespan, was established, according to one biographer, 'mainly for research purposes [and] for the promotion of education';[2] and although this underestimates the range of projects it supported in its early years (and barely suggests the kinds of projects it funds today),[3] it efficiently summarizes the kinds of work Rowntree expected it to do. Rowntree regarded the separation between the three Trusts as 'merely a legal one',[4] and the original boards of trustees were the same: Rowntree himself, his sons John Wilhelm, Benjamin Seebohm, Joseph Stephenson and Oscar Frederick Rowntree, and his nephew Arnold Rowntree. This article, focusing on the JRCT, locates Rowntree's philanthropy in the context of the wider currents of Victorian and Edwardian philanthropic developments, the nineteenth-century growth of Quaker social concern and the changing perceptions of the problem of poverty in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that Rowntree's benevolence was essentially predicated on a Victorian view of the role of the philanthropist, modified by his experience of the nineteenth-century growth of Quaker social concern.

When Rowntree established his three Trusts, he was acting not just in one but in many traditions of philanthropic endeavour—both inside and outside the Society of Friends—whose roots lay in the historical period through which he had lived and which had shaped his personal views. Rowntree, essentially, was an outsider. He spent almost all his life in a provincial town, York, and most of his philanthropy was directed to specifically local objectives. Although politically active to a moderate degree, his name was probably known to few outside York except as a manufacturer of cocoa and confectionery. He was an

2. [Luther Worstenholme?], 'Joseph Rowntree (1836–1925): A Typescript Memoir, and Related Papers', p. K7. (Each chapter of the memoir, which is in the JRCT library, The Garden House, York, is page-numbered separately. The second part of this quotation is a handwritten addition to the typescript.)

3. The JRCT and the Social Service Trust were not wound up after 35 years, and remain in existence, the latter now known as the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd. The Village Trust became the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust in 1959, and is now the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. For the history of this Trust after 1954, see Lewis E. Waddilove, *Private Philanthropy and Public Welfare: The Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust 1954–1979* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

4. Joseph Rowntree, memorandum 29 Dec. 1904, p. 1, in JRCT, *Basic Documents*, JRCT library.

active member of a marginal religious sect, the Society of Friends, whose alienating mode of worship, strict adherence to the Book of Discipline, archaic forms of speech and plain dress code all clearly marked them out in the first half of the nineteenth century as being different. Rowntree moved within his own circles, not the least important of which was his large family, whose long-standing Quaker piety, liberal social outlook, business acumen and social concern he inherited and passed on to his children. Moreover, as an early biographer emphasized, Rowntree was not well known even to Quakers outside York.[5] Only rarely did he achieve prominence at Yearly Meeting, although he was a trustee of the Quaker periodical *The Friend*, and the vast bulk of the personal and financial benevolence in which he engaged had a distinctly provincial, if not local, focus.

Nevertheless, the wider national and international changes wrought in Rowntree's long lifetime affected him, sometimes very deeply. He was born in 1836 and died in 1925; and thus, as Anne Vernon has pointed out, he 'belonged to the generation which stared at the last stage-coaches in its childhood and the first aeroplanes in its old age'.[6] Born when the Whig Lord Melbourne was Prime Minister, he lived to see the first Labour government in 1924. He grew up in the 'Hungry Forties', read about the European revolutions and the Chartist demonstration of 1848, the Crimean War and the rise of Gladstone and Disraeli; and in his dotage saw a world war and the heyday of Baldwin and MacDonald. Perhaps most significantly, he was born in a period when most of the British population lived in rural districts, and died when the overwhelming majority lived in towns, and he saw much of the social dislocation that went with this demographic transition. Ruralism and rural life were important to Rowntree, as they were to his son Benjamin Seebohm who, although best known for his surveys of poverty in a provincial town, remained interested in problems of agriculture and the countryside throughout his life.[7] The Rowntree family shared in the 'discovery' of rural England in the second half of the nineteenth century,[8] and it was in ruralism and the restoration of pre-industrial social relationships that Joseph, like many of his contemporaries,

5. Worstenholme, 'Typescript Memoir', p. F12.

6. Anne Vernon, *A Quaker Business Man: The Life of Joseph Rowntree 1836–1925* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 9.

7. See, e.g., B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Land and Labour: Lessons from Belgium* (London: Macmillan, 1910); *The Agricultural Dilemma: A Report of an Enquiry Organised by Viscount Astor and B. Seebohm Rowntree* (London: P.S. King, 1935).

8. Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 62-88.

saw potential solutions to the problems of poverty and ignorance in urban communities that he sought to address.

The Victorian Philanthropic Background

Olive Checkland's history of philanthropy in Scotland divides Victorian and Edwardian philanthropy into three phases—each of which can also be applied to English developments[9]—to which I have added a fourth in the light of more recent historiography. Although each of these phases was characterized by different dominant approaches to philanthropy, throughout each there runs one recurring theme: the idea that industrialization and urbanization fundamentally altered not only the economic and social, but also the charitable, relationships between men and women of different classes in Britain. The partial restoration of pre-industrial social and charitable relationships remained a central tenet of British philanthropy right down to the First World War.

The first phase was a direct response to the industrialization that crowded a population that had always been overwhelmingly rural and agricultural into towns and cities that underwent a rapid and unregulated growth. This unchecked outburst of urbanization issued a fundamental challenge to English philanthropists. In the older towns, the well-established endowed charities and parochial charity systems were unable to cope with new patterns of residence and poverty; and in the newer urban units there were simply no philanthropic foundations on which to build.[10] More fundamentally, the transition to an urban society seemed to contemporaries to damage the organic communities and face-to-face social relationships associated with rural society. Industrial economic and social relations undermined the simple vectors between rich and poor through which pre-industrial charity could be bestowed. Thus one of the earliest philanthropic reactions to the twin cataclysms of industrialization and urbanization was the attempt to rebuild these social bridges by re-establishing the kind of neighbourly contact with the poor that had supposedly existed in the pre-industrial countryside.[11] Often prompted by religious zeal

9.   Olive Checkland, *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland: Social Welfare and the Voluntary Principle* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1980), pp. 3-4, 332.

10.   See e.g., F.K. Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (1988), p. 34; David Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660–1960* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1965, 1965), pp. 444-48.

11.   Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home—Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century', in Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 35-37; Proschaska, *Voluntary Impulse*, pp. 25-27, 34-58.

and concern for the souls of the urban heathen as much as for their short-term material well-being, such ventures involved personal visiting of working-class homes, the distribution of religious tracts, words of friendly and helpful practical and moral advice, and the provision of tangible relief in the form of food, clothing or money. Through 'district visiting' of this kind it was hoped that the virtues of thrift, diligence and self-sacrifice could be instilled into the English poor.

The promotion of these virtues essentially underpinned the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), which clarified, in theory if not in practice, the demarcation between the statutory and voluntary sectors of welfare provision.[12] This Act, prompted by the belief that 'lavish poor relief led to insubordination and violence',[13] laid down the principles that 'outdoor relief', essentially doles of money or food, should not be given; and that 'indoor relief', that is the workhouse, should be provided on such 'ineligible' conditions that the poor would only apply for it if in the direst need. It was hoped that, if statutory relief was given only under such conditions, private charity, which could be bestowed on a non-universal basis and hence could take account of personal character prior to almsgiving, would pick up a greater share of the growing cost of providing relief. These principles—established as much as a device for keeping the poor rates low as for any other purpose, and insofar as they were ever stringently applied except in the most punitive Poor Law Unions—were gradually whittled away by the liberality of Poor Law Boards of Guardians over the next 70 years. In any case, they did nothing to stem the rising tide of indiscriminate voluntary charity. Indeed, the complexity of British charity was such that philanthropists often ended up competing among themselves; and the charitable world was beset with sectarian and denominational rivalries, not to mention simple personality clashes, which contributed to a large-scale misdirection of charitable benevolence.[14] It was not only mean-spiritedness that led many mid-Victorians to realize that the systems of poor relief and charitable welfare provision were in need of more efficient coordination.

This brings us to the second phase in the history of Victorian philanthropy, the period when large-scale attempts were made to organize and regulate

12.   Proschaska, *Voluntary Impulse*, p. 35.

13.   Pauline Gregg, *A Social and Economic History of Britain 1760–1970* (London: George G. Harrap, 1971 [1950]), p. 180.

14.   Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain 1830–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 135-36 and *passim*; see also Brian Harrison, 'Philanthropy and the Victorians', *Victorian Studies* 9 (1966), pp. 367ff.

charitable provision. The formation of the Charity Organization Society (COS)[15] in 1869 made by far the most significant step in this direction. The Society was based on the premise that indiscriminate almsgiving had a pauperizing effect on the recipient, and that the overlapping of charitable provision enabled and encouraged the poor to make repeated and frequently fraudulent claims on the philanthropic purse. The COS intended to restore the distinction between relief and charity through the establishment of a rigorous system of district offices for detailed investigation of the cases of individuals, who, if found 'deserving', would be directed to the appropriate charitable agency and, if 'undeserving', would be sent to the Poor Law Guardians. The COS was not slow to condemn charity of which it disapproved on the grounds that it made no such distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' and hence pauperized the recipient,[16] such as the efforts of the Salvation Army and Dr Barnardo. The COS had a comparatively limited impact in York; but its spokesmen found ample opportunity to criticize the peculiarly unsystematic system of charities in the city, as it did, for example, when the high local unemployment of the mid-1900s was met by various schemes of work relief and indiscriminate charity, some of them supported by the Rowntree family.[17] The Society insisted that voluntarily provided and efficiently bestowed charity was the only means by which the poor could be led towards ultimate individual independence. Class separation and segregation 'demoralized' the poor and 'depersonalized' or 'deformed' the gift relationship that was the fundamental element of charity;[18] and hence the COS, like the district visitors of the early nineteenth century, aimed at raising the moral character of the poor through a restoration of the social relationships associated with the pre-industrial economy. Taking their inspiration from Edward Denison, who in the late 1860s went to live among the poor of London's East End in recognition of the obstacles to personal charity posed by

15.   For general accounts of the history of the COS, see Helen Bosanquet, *Social Work in London 1896–1912: A History of the Charity Organisation Society* (London: John Murray, 1914); Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869–1913: Its Ideas and Work* (London: Methuen, 1961); Madeline Rooff, *A Hundred Years of Family Welfare: A Study of the Family Welfare Association (Formerly Charity Organisation Society) 1869–1969* (London: Michael Joseph, 1972); Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain: The Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association Since 1869* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995).

16.   See Owen, *English Philanthropy*, pp. 216-44 (229).

17.   A.J. Peacock, *York 1900 to 1914* (York: York Settlement Trust, 1997), pp. 120-22, and *passim*.

18.   Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984 [1971]), ch. 13.

urban residential class segregation, and whose premature death gave him the status of a martyr in the cause of well-directed philanthropy,[19] the COS hoped that, in Gareth Stedman Jones's words, 'the capital city would be turned into a gigantic village, and its poor would be led back to manliness and independence under the firm but benevolent aegis of a new urban squirearchy'.[20]

Although it can be asserted that the COS 'embod[ied] in institutional form the conventional assumptions which guided Victorian social action',[21] at least as far as welfare provision was concerned, it was also 'unfortunate for the advocates of philanthropy that just as they felt they were putting their house in order, assumptions about the causes of poverty were shifting and the government began to take a greater interest in social matters'.[22] During Checkland's third phase of Victorian philanthropy, the voluntary sector had to come to terms with the growing importance of the state in welfare provision in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which issued a sometimes fundamental challenge to many of the precepts of the British philanthropic tradition. In her autobiography, Beatrice Webb famously remembered 'a new consciousness of sin among men of intellect and men of property' which peaked in the 1880s and provoked a reappraisal of the individualist and non-interventionist Liberalism which lay behind much if not most Victorian social and philanthropic thought.[23] One of the clearest manifestations of this 'consciousness of sin' was the development of systematic social investigation, and in particular the study of poverty, in which Seebohm Rowntree came to play an important role. Rowntree's suggestion that much working-class poverty was caused by structural factors rather than the failings of the individual implied that collectivist solutions to the problem might be appropriate. As the Cambridge economist and charity organization theorist Alfred Marshall told the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor in 1893, 'while the problem of 1834 was the problem of pauperism, the problem of 1893 is the problem of poverty…extreme poverty ought to be regarded, not indeed as a crime, but as a thing so detrimental to the State that it should not be endured'; this he called 'the fundamental position'.[24] The impetus to social reform culminated in the

19.   See Baldwyn Leighton (ed.), *Letters and Other Writings of the Late Edward Denison* (London: Richard Bentley, 1872).

20.   Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 261.

21.   Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 211.

22.   Proschaska, *Voluntary Impulse*, p. 70.

23.   Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971 [1926]), pp. 191-93.

24.   J.M. Keynes (ed.), *Official Papers by Alfred Marshall* (London: Macmillan, 1926), pp. 244-45.

'new Liberalism' of the reforming government elected in the landslide of 1906, many of whose social reforms were bitterly opposed by COS spokesmen, who also attacked Seebohm Rowntree's explanations of the problem of poverty.[25]

However, the 'consciousness of sin' also resolved itself through new vectors of philanthropy, many of which shared the underlying assumptions of the COS. The most tangible result was the establishment of university settlements.[26] The first and most noteworthy of these was Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, established by Canon Samuel Barnett, vicar of St Jude's Church. This involved the long-term residence of Oxford graduates in the East End, where it was hoped they would replace the resident gentry whose wholesale exodus from such poor districts was thought to bear much of the blame for the 'demoralized' condition of the urban poor. Here they would meet the working classes personally, educate them in practical and theoretical subjects, and discover 'new forms of religion more relevant to modern experience and thought'.[27] Although the settlements, by fusing the philosophical understanding of graduates gained in an academic environment with direct experience of work among the poor, acted as a finishing school for a generation of social reformers—R.H. Tawney, William Beveridge and Clement Attlee, to name just three, were residents at Toynbee Hall in the Edwardian period—the movement can also be viewed as an outgrowth and development of the social philosophy of the COS. Stedman Jones has argued that Toynbee Hall 'merely put into institutional form, ideas and practices which had largely been developed in the 1860s and 1870s';[28] while Standish Meacham has portrayed it as part of a long tradition of this kind of philanthropy that embraced such figures as Thomas Chalmers, Edward Denison and Octavia Hill.[29] Indeed, Canon Barnett was enthusiastic about the COS in its early years—although he

25. Graham Bowpitt, 'Poverty and Its Early Critics: The Search for a Value-Free Definition of the Problem', in Jonathan Bradshaw and Roy Sainsbury (eds.), *Getting the Measure of Poverty: The Early Legacy of Seebohm Rowntree* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 23-38.

26. On settlements see esp. Werner Picht, *Toynbee Hall and the English Settlement Movement* (1914); J.A.R. Pimlott, *Toynbee Hall: Fifty Years of Social Progress* (London: J.M. Dent, 1935); Asa Briggs and Anne Macartney, *Toynbee Hall: The First Hundred Years* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); Standish Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform 1880–1914: The Search for Community* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Jon Glasby (ed.), *'Back to the Future': The History of the Settlement Movement and Its Relevance for Organisations Today* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Settlement, 2000).

27. Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994 [1993]), p. 175.

28. Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 259.

29. Meacham, *Toynbee Hall*, pp. 6-7.

later disagreed publicly with its principles and its leaders[30]—and like the COS he aimed explicitly at the restoration of 'individual connection'.[31] However, there was also a community focus to the settlement movement, and this marks it out from groups that aimed primarily to restore the individual reciprocity that had been the supposed hallmark of pre-industrial charitable relationships. Toynbee Hall was a centre of social inquiry as well as social work, and as Meacham explains, this element of settlement work transcended the individualism of much Victorian charity, aiming at 'the regeneration of individuals within a restored and revitalized community'.[32]

This emphasis on the community was crucial to the Edwardian conception of philanthropy, and represents perhaps the biggest change from the Victorian period; indeed, it justifies consideration as a fourth phase in the history of British philanthropy before 1914. Keith Laybourn and others have described in some detail the conception of the community that lay behind the new organizing charities of the 1900s, especially the Guilds of Help and the Councils of Social Welfare, which represented more humane versions of the COS.[33] The older body was itself affected by these changes. As Jane Lewis explains in a history of the COS, voluntary charity in the Edwardian period was directed towards 'social efficiency and participation' rather than 'poverty *per se*'.[34] In modern parlance, we might say that the goal was 'social inclusion', and Joseph Rowntree and many of the other philanthropists of his age sought this aim through various economic, social and religious channels. The deflection of social concern from pauperism to poverty had direct implications for the community. Unlike pauperism, which essentially entailed the separation of paupers from mainstream society, poverty affected all members of the community, both directly and materially in the form of crime and other manifestations of social dislocation, and morally and culturally by imposing feelings of social duty onto the community's natural leaders. Hence more philanthropists came to define their responsibilities in terms of the community and the reciprocal social duties of its members. It might be argued that this represented a shift from the Judaeo-Christian concept of charity, with its emphasis on individual relationships and reciprocity, to a more classical one,

30. See, e.g., Mowat, *Charity Organisation Society*, pp. 126-31; Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 140-41.

31. Meacham, *Toynbee Hall*, p. 37.

32. Meacham, *Toynbee Hall*, p. 23.

33. Keith Laybourn (ed.), *Social Conditions, Status and Community 1860–c.1920* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997).

34. Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, p. 26.

based on a communal, or a civic, conception of gifting.[35] However, and crucially, this theory of philanthropy, although resolved in different practical manifestations from its predecessors, was still fundamentally backward-looking. Many of the COS activists of the 1900s—still concentrating on urban communities—drew on a medieval conception of the English town, focusing their attentions on the development of active citizenship through both philanthropic endeavour and the work of new institutions of municipal government.[36] Although it operated within modern institutions of urban governance, this philanthropic outlook was still fundamentally predicated on the superiority of pre-industrial social relationships. Thus Eglantyne Jebb, a member of the Cambridge COS and later a founder of the Save the Children Fund, remarked in 1906 that

> In old days, under the feudalistic regime, charity could undoubtedly do its work more simply. The mass of the poor were collected into villages under some roughly benevolent despot, whose lady too, often busied herself with the friendly oversight of village affairs. Under the different circumstances of the times the plan may have worked tolerably well, and the help may have been effective in a way it cannot be now, with our system of town life.[37]

A number of themes emerge from this discussion of the theory and practice of philanthropy in the Victorian and Edwardian periods which are of direct relevance to a consideration of Joseph Rowntree and the establishment of the JRCT. First, the development of systematic social investigation as an essential prelude to informed social work and reform (whether statutory or voluntary) influenced Rowntree to make this a feature of the planned expenditure of his Trust. Secondly, the establishment of Toynbee Hall and other university settlements had important ramifications for the Rowntrees. Unlike many provincial towns, York did not have a settlement: it lacked a university, and the early settlements were mostly established by academics and occupied by graduates. However, Rowntree was impressed with them, as shown by the arrangement he made later in his life for the distribution of copies of a biography of Canon Barnett.[38] Thirdly, the relationship between statutory and voluntary welfare provision was continually changing, and would continue to

35.   Lewis E. Waddilove, *Foundations and Trusts: Innovators or Survivals?* (London: National Institute for Social Work, 1979), p. 5.

36.   See Mark Freeman, 'The Provincial Social Survey in Edwardian Britain', *Historical Research* 75 (2002), pp. 73-89.

37.   Eglantyne Jebb, *Cambridge: A Brief Study in Social Questions* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Bowes, 1906), pp. 197-98.

38.   Worstenholme, 'Typescript Memoir', p. F10.

do so during the twentieth century, as many of the activities which were formerly the province of the voluntary sector were gradually, and sometimes suddenly, assumed as responsibilities of the state or local authorities. Finally, the theme of personal service that runs through the discussion of the four phases of British philanthropy, albeit expressed in different ways, was central to Rowntree's thought. Personal service both to the individual and to the community remained an essential calling of the philanthropist.

The Influence of York Quakerism

If Rowntree was a Victorian, he was also a Quaker; and the second half of the nineteenth century saw a transformation in the social outlook of the Society of Friends no less dramatic than the changes taking place in British society as a whole. Quakers were at first slow to adapt to the changing Victorian social environment. Their strict and unforgiving internal discipline reflected a disinclination to any kind of active social involvement outside their own sect; and the 'quietism' that characterized early Victorian Quakerism manifested itself in an otherworldliness that downplayed involvement in social questions and disdained politics. In any case, the Test and Corporation Acts, in force until 1828, prevented Quakers and other Nonconformists from holding public office, while the ancient universities and most professions were closed to them. This began to change in the mid-nineteenth century,[39] as internal discipline and external exclusion were relaxed, and Quakers began to involve themselves in a wider range of social and political activities including the Anti-Corn Law League, the UK Alliance temperance organization, the campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts, and other causes. As Elizabeth Isichei has pointed out, Quakers' concerns were shifting from the amelioration of distress—William Allen had established a 'soup society' to dish out food for the destitute Spitalfields silk weavers in the early part of the nineteenth century—to the 'social causes of distress': 'the channels through which the Quaker social conscience acted were changing, though the vigour and sensitivity of that conscience remained'.[40] Quakers sought a faith with direct relevance to solving the underlying causes of social problems: no project better epitomized this transition than Seebohm Rowntree's first social survey of

39.   The best general accounts are Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), and James Walvin, *The Quakers: Money and Morals* (London: John Murray, 1997). See also Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (2 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1921), II, ch. 24.

40.   Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, pp. 256-57.

York, published in 1901, which claimed to show that more than a quarter of the population of the city lived in a condition of poverty.[41]

York lay at the centre of what one historian called this 'awakening to a new life' among Friends.[42] The unchallenged headquarters of the Society in the north, York Meeting grew during the first half of the nineteenth century, while the Society as a whole was in decline;[43] and this expansion continued into the twentieth century. Membership in the city grew from around 200 in 1855 to 543 by 1915, while for Britain as a whole the increase was only about a quarter.[44] York Quakers also enjoyed a reputation for radicalism within the Society. For example, it was Joseph Rowntree's brother John Stephenson Rowntree's provocative essay on *Quakerism: Past and Present* (1859) that provoked the fierce debates at Yearly Meeting on disownment policies and dress codes.[45] In the later nineteenth century, encouraged by the 'overwhelming demand for a faith that was contemporary',[46] a new generation of Rowntrees pressed for further changes of attitude among the Quaker community. John Wilhelm Rowntree, Joseph's eldest son, who died prematurely at the age of 36 in 1905, addressed a special conference at Manchester in 1895, arguing that the Society was failing to address the concerns of a younger generation that, having grown up in the social and intellectual ferment of the 1880s, desired above all other things a religion that would connect itself to the social concerns of a Britain that was demonstrably experiencing a post-industrialization malaise. John Wilhelm argued that traditional Quaker quietism, which had been challenged and in some ways already surpassed by the growing social involvement of Friends, needed to be further subsumed beneath the urgent task of reconnecting Quakerism to the wider society of which its members remained a numerically insignificant minority.[47]

41. B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2000 [1901]).

42. Jones, *Later Periods*, II, p. 942.

43. For an analysis of this expansion, see Sheila Wright, *Friends in York: The Dynamics of Quaker Revival 1780–1860* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1995).

44. Stephen Allott, *Friends in York: The Quaker Story in the Life of a Meeting* (York: Sessions of York, 1978), p. 78; Walvin, *The Quakers*, p. 137.

45. See Ernest E. Taylor (ed.), *John Stephenson Rowntree: His Life and Work* (London: Headley Brothers, 1908).

46. Allott, *Friends in York*, p. 95.

47. For a fuller account of John Wilhelm Rowntree and the Manchester conference, see Stephen Allott, *John Wilhelm Rowntree 1868–1905 and the Beginnings of Modern Quakerism* (York: Sessions of York, 1994); Alastair Heron, *Quakers in Britain: A Century of Change 1895–1995* (Kelso: Curlew Graphics, 1995), pp. 19-29.

Perhaps the most significant result of the new radicalism among young Friends in the 1890s was the reinvigoration of a long-standing Quaker interest in adult education. The adult school movement, which reached a peak in membership of over 100,000 in the years before the First World War, had involved many Quakers from at least the mid-nineteenth century. Joseph Rowntree had taught in the adult schools for 40 years, and was followed by his sons and his nephew Arnold Rowntree, for whom adult education was to become the work of a lifetime. Seebohm Rowntree dated his interest in the problem of poverty to his years as an adult school teacher, remembering how he 'visited [his] scholars in their homes and thus got to know the conditions under which they lived'.[48] His brother John Wilhelm did the same,[49] as had Joseph Rowntree before them.[50] This kind of work gave socially concerned Quakers an opportunity not just to impart learning but also to learn themselves about the way the poor lived, giving them the kind of contact that was only rarely obtained in other ways. As Rufus Jones, a close friend of John Wilhelm Rowntree, explained, the adult school movement was the most significant of all the social and institutional manifestations of the Quaker social conscience:

> More than any other single thing which Friends have undertaken…this work has taken the members of the Society out of themselves… It has given them deep and intense human interests, sympathy and fellowship. The life and problems of a different class of persons from themselves have been brought home to their own experience, and their whole knowledge of the world has been transformed thereby, and not their knowledge only, but their entire human attitude as well… Through this fellowship with the working men and their families Friends were brought face to face with problems of the social order which they would have known about only in an abstract way if it had not been for this direct contact… It was a natural unfolding and maturing of social interest…[51]

In York, there were adult schools at 13 separate centres by 1905, with a membership of 2,648 and an average attendance of 1,186;[52] and all told there were 288 such Quaker establishments in Britain by 1900.[53] The schools were the clearest expression of the interconnectedness of Quaker religious,

48. Quoted in Asa Briggs, *Social Thought and Social Action: A Study of the Work of Seebohm Rowntree* (London: Longmans, Green, 1961), p. 13.

49. Allott, *John Wilhelm Rowntree*, pp. 13-14.

50. Worstenholme, 'Typescript Memoir', pp. C4, D8-9.

51. Jones, *Later Periods*, vol. II, pp. 956-58.

52. Allott, *Friends in York*, p. 92.

53. Walvin, *The Quakers*, p. 152.

economic and social concerns, and reflected no less clearly the overarching importance of personal service, which informed Joseph Rowntree's conception of social work and responsibility. For Rowntree, York's long tradition of adult education served in some respects the connective functions of the metropolitan social settlements which he admired, and this connective impulse was what drove his philanthropy.

The Early Grant-Making Priorities of the JRCT: Education and Educational Settlements

This impulse was reflected in the JRCT's involvement in the establishment of educational settlements in the years leading up to the First World War, and their support for such settlements thereafter.[54] These settlements were primarily non-residential centres of adult education, although many followed the Victorian social settlements in developing various additional social functions. The first two such settlements, growing directly from the adult school movement and taking some of their inspiration from the social settlements, were St Mary's in York and the Swarthmore Settlement in Leeds, both established in 1909, in both of which the Rowntree family was directly involved. The Beechcroft settlement in Birkenhead was established in 1914 by another Quaker, Horace Fleming.[55] After the war there were many new settlements of this type, including Bensham Grove in Gateshead (founded in 1919), the Folk House, Bristol (1919), Swarthmore Hall in Plymouth and the Letchworth Settlement (both 1920). By 1935 there were 32, federated into an Educational Settlements Association (founded in 1919 as the Northern Settlements Association). Not all were established under Quaker auspices, but most involved Quakers to some degree; and this crusade for Quaker adult education (significantly usually referred to, like the adult schools and the social settlements, as a 'movement') became by far the largest grant-making area in

54.   On educational settlements, later known as educational centres, see A.J. Allaway, *The Educational Centres Movement: A Comprehensive Survey* (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1961); Mark Freeman, '"No Finer School than a Settlement": The Development of the Educational Settlement Movement', *History of Education* 31 (2002), pp. 245-62. There are briefer accounts in J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790–1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 311-12; Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1962), pp. 263-65, 277-78; John Lowe, *Adult Education in England and Wales: A Critical Survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), pp. 60-65.

55.   Horace Fleming, *Beechcroft: The Story of the Birkenhead Settlement 1914–1924: An Experiment in Adult Education* (London: Educational Settlements Association, 1938).

which the JRCT spent its money in the first 35 years of its existence. At the end of these 35 years, Seebohm Rowntree calculated that 45 per cent of the Trust's expenditure had gone on educational objects (the bulk of this on settlements), and a further 31 per cent on other objects, many of which themselves had an educational focus, such as the support of Woodbrooke College in Birmingham. By contrast, only 9 per cent had been spent on social and economic investigation, with which the Rowntrees, especially Seebohm, had long been associated.[56] The settlements became particularly important to Joseph Rowntree after the First World War: in a memorandum to the trustees in 1919, he explained that settlements were 'so manifestly what the country is needing now', and he hoped that they would 'link on naturally to the work of the Workers' Educational Association and to Associations for strengthening the International spirit'.[57]

One thing that virtually all these settlements had in common was that they grew from the adult school movement; and as far as possible the ethos of the adult schools was transmitted to the new institutions. The pre-war pioneers were keen to emphasize the links between the new settlements and the adult schools: Arnold Rowntree, speaking at the official opening of the St Mary's settlement, pointed out that its establishment did not mean 'any break in connection with the past history of the Adult School Movement', but was rather 'only the necessary growth and extension of the activities of that movement'.[58] Adult school membership peaked in 1910, and went into continual decline thereafter;[59] and as became clear during and after the First World War, a rapidly secularizing society exhibited less desire for Bible study and outward religious observance. Thus Joseph Rowntree was especially hopeful that settlements might come to do the work of churches and chapels, where attendance was decreasing, in shaping what he called 'the spiritual fellowships of the future'.[60] The quasi-religious atmosphere that pervaded

56.   B.S. Rowntree, 'Report on the Work Done by the JRCT, 1905–1939, and Suggestions...Regarding Future Policy', Joseph Rowntree Foundation archive (JRF) JRCT93/I/11 (d). My figures are based on an aggregation of Rowntree's categories. A further 4 per cent had been spent on the promotion of peace, 4 per cent on miscellaneous objects, and 7 per cent on administrative costs. The figures do not appear to have been adjusted for inflation.

57.   Joseph Rowntree, memorandum of 16 April 1919, inset in JRCT Minute book, no. 1, pp. 241-42.

58.   'Educational Work in York', JRF ROWN.FAM.L/93/3.

59.   W. Arnold Hall, *The Adult School Movement in the Twentieth Century* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Department of Adult Education, 1985), p. 213.

60.   'Joseph Rowntree and Adult Education', tyepscript of article, June 1925, JRF JR93/VIII/2.

many of the settlements aroused suspicion among some consumers of adult education, one critic characterizing an unnamed settlement as simply 'an Adult School dolled up'.[61] Just as adult schools had come to acquire a range of associated activities only loosely connected with their educational focus—one adult school worker noted that '[e]very real Adult School gathers other activities round it than the Sunday morning or afternoon lesson: Savings Funds, Libraries, Temperance Societies, Sick Clubs, and the like'[62]—so the educational settlements often developed drama and music clubs, debating societies and similar activities.

This feature was shared by the social settlements, and although educational settlements were essentially outgrowths from the adult school movement, they were most naturally compared with the older residential institutions such as Toynbee Hall; and they were clearly modelled in part on these institutions. 'Connection' was no less important to the educational settlement pioneers than to Canon Barnett. The settlement was conceived as a homely environment, where freedom of expression went hand-in-hand with spiritual guidance in a supportive and unintimidating environment. Just as the residents of Toynbee Hall were engaged in the 'search for community', Horace Fleming believed that the educational settlement played a role in re-moulding fractured community relationships, employing in 1929 language strikingly similar to that used by Victorian urban philanthropists:

> The Settlement, in drawing together larger numbers of the sundered units of humanity and reconciling them into a community, is providing in our modern complex society facilities for growth similar to those created by the family in simpler forms of social organisation. The same qualities of sympathy, tolerance, understanding and comradeship are induced, and in group activities values are discovered which include the welfare of others. These community groups, in providing a stand against the disintegrating forces of modern life, are comparable to the family group in primitive times.[63]

As a conference of extension secretaries held at Woodbrooke College in 1912 agreed, the homely environment and personal contact was central to the educational vision of these centres, possibly even more important than the provision of classes and lectures:

61. W.E. Williams, 'The Educational Settlements: A Report Prepared for the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust', October 1938, JRF JRCT93/IV/2, p. 118.

62. Edward Grubb, *What Is Quakerism? An Exposition of the Leading Principles and Practices of the Society of Friends, as Based on the Experiences of 'The Inward Light'* (London: Headley Brothers, 1917), pp. 176-77.

63. Horace Fleming, *The Lighted Mind: The Challenge of Adult Education to Quakerism* (London: Friends' Book Centre, 1929), p. 57.

> The idea would be for some Friend and his wife or sister to take a house conveniently situated, and keep one or two rooms at liberty for evening callers, taking care, however, that these rooms remain homelike. The host or hostess would entertain simply those who came, perhaps sometimes introducing a friend who wanted to tell a fresh experience, or discuss a living problem, or ask a vital question. Gradually there might grow up continuous teaching work, but not so much as to overshadow the ministry of the host and hostess in their own home. The quality of the personal service rendered would be the first thing.[64]

The aim, then, was to provide a collegial, even a familial environment, where the work of education in its most general sense could be carried on. In some cases, as at Beechcroft in its earliest years, the settlement was literally in somebody's home; this was the epitome of the connective spirit of education that men like Joseph Rowntree sought to promote. The intangible spirit of 'fellowship' which was supposedly fostered in these 'homes' evoked metaphors that stressed the familial characteristics of the settlements and the idea that in the common room and in friendly intercourse the religious and social sensitivities of the individual could be moulded and channelled in the direction of social and religious service. Indeed, the common room was central to the idea of the settlement (the Educational Settlements Association's journal was entitled *The Common Room*), envisaged as the nucleus of a social centre that enabled fellowship to be grafted onto education.

The continuing importance of personal contact was also reflected the JRCT's concern to promote an itinerant Quaker ministry that would strengthen the Society at a local level. The Trust supported individuals whose energetic ministry was aimed at the visitation and strengthening of local Meetings. One of these was Edward Grubb, who became the first secretary of the Woodbrooke Extension Committee on its establishment in 1907. During the second half of that year he reported to the trustees that he had organized summer schools at Guildford, Kendal and Glasgow, given addresses in Leeds, Bradford and Ipswich, lectured weekly at both York and Luton, spent almost every Sunday attending Meetings away from home, and acted as secretary of the Yearly Meeting Ministry Committee; and on top of this he was preparing to write two books and to endeavour to boost the circulation of *The Friend*.[65] Similarly, Herbert Waller, another JRCT employee, reported that in 1911 he had given courses of lectures at Huddersfield, Leeds and Malton, made weekend visits to a number of Yorkshire Meetings, been involved in the

64. Report of Conference of Extension Secretaries held at Colwyn Bay, 25–27 May 1912, JRF JRCT93/VI/1 (a).

65. JRCT Minute book, no. 1, pp. 51-52.

organization of two 'Settlements' (in this case short-term residential courses) and other Quaker social gatherings.[66] Another 'Trust servant', Foster Brady, worked as field secretary of the Yorkshire 1905 Committee,[67] and in 1910 was involved in large Quaker 'Settlements' at Settle and Rawdon, visited adult schools and Meetings in Yorkshire most weekends, gave various lectures, and was commended for his 'personal influence...over younger members [of the Society] especially'.[68] Such grants were central to Rowntree's aims in establishing the Trust, and long remained a source of pride among the trustees: Roger C. Wilson, a trustee from 1948 to 1977, claimed in 1973 that the most important thing the Trust had done was 'the liberation of certain Friends [such as Grubb, Waller and Brady] for the service of the Society'.[69] The service they performed was personal, involving the encouragement of young Quakers into personal social service and social leadership.

The educational settlements fitted neatly into this conception of social service, and although 'fellowship' was a key word of the movement, 'leadership' was no less important. Thus Joseph Rowntree and his contemporaries saw in the development of courses in such subjects as economics and 'civics' a key role for the settlements in fostering a spirit of citizenship and in the training of voluntary workers for future social service.[70] Courses such as this reflected the Edwardian concern for the community and its collective future; and it was envisaged by many educational settlement pioneers that the new institutions would provide trained leaders to serve on local government bodies and in philanthropic agencies. The increasing involvement of the state in social work and the relief of poverty in this period, much of which was administered by strengthened organs of local government in collaboration with voluntary organizations, actually gave voluntarists an opportunity to find a new role for themselves in shaping the collective futures of the communities in which they operated.[71] The popularity of social-science-based courses and

66. Report on Herbert I. Waller, inset in JRCT Minute book, no. 1, pp. 85-86.

67. A body established following John Wilhelm Rowntree's death in the same year, aimed at the strengthening of Quaker educational endeavour in the north of England.

68. Report on Foster E. Brady, 28 November 1910, inset in JRCT Minute book, no. 1, pp. 69-70.

69. Roger C. Wilson, 'The Founder's Commission', p. 21 in JRCT, *Basic Documents*.

70. JRCT Minute book, no. 1, pp. 180-81; Fleming, *Lighted Mind*, pp. 58-59 and *passim*; Williams, 'Educational Settlements', *passim*.

71. See, e.g., A. M. MacBriar, *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles: The Bosanquets versus the Webbs: A Study in British Social Policy 1890–1929* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 182-95; Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 171-76; Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, pp. 25-43, 69-79.

debating societies in the settlements reflected the training for social leadership that the pioneers aimed to provide. The adult school movement had been 'of great value in training men (and women too) for the right discharge of the duties of citizenship, whether as leaders of co-operative societies, or members of Trade Councils and Town Councils, and even in some cases candidates for Parliament'.[72] The educational settlements, originating from a philanthropic tradition that emphasized active involvement in local charity and governance, followed this approach in both their educational and ancillary activities.

Conclusion: Philanthropy, the State and the Rowntree View of Charity

The settlements, then, were conceived as a constructive Quaker response to the encroachment of the state into many areas of economic and social life, part of an ongoing reappraisal within the ranks of British Quakerism of the relationship of social service to the state. However, the response, as far as the Rowntrees were concerned, retained much of the Victorian insistence on the value of personal service, while the influence of Edwardian philanthropic developments gave this individualistic conception of charity a community-based context in which to operate. Quakerism gave the JRCT and its sister Trusts a religious focus, emphasizing the inability of collectivist state-sponsored social reforms to foster among the people what Seebohm Rowntree called 'the higher parts of their nature'.[73] The importance of a continuance and revitalization of the individualist and voluntarist tradition was expressed forcefully in the Swarthmore Lecture delivered in 1913 by Joseph Rowntree's cousin Joshua Rowntree:[74]

> It may be said that the world has got beyond the stage of voluntaryism [*sic*] in social service. It must now be handed over to the legislature, and enforced by the State. No doubt steam rollers are invaluable for certain purposes, but where you are dealing with the higher needs of the mysterious compounds of body, soul, and spirit,—the growth of character in the most sensitive organisms of creation,—their usefulness may easily be overestimated. Life only proceeds from life... By all means let the ground upon which humanity builds and lives and rears its young be made as sanitary and secure as possible; but let the gardens of

72. Grubb, *What Is Quakerism?*, p. 178.

73. Rowntree, *Poverty*, p. 305.

74. The annual Swarthmore Lecture was established and financed with JRCT support. For a consideration of the early history of the lecture, see Janet Scott, 'The Making of an Institution: The Swarthmore Lecture 1907–1913', *Quaker Studies* 1 (1995), typescript copy in Friends House Library, shelved with *Quaker Studies*.

the soul and the fruits of the spirit rejoice in a liberty and guidance above and
beyond the control of civil engineers, and the shaping even of the best town
Councils.[75]

As an illustration of this, Rowntree turned to education, arguing that although
few could disagree with the benefits conferred by the spread of universal state-
sponsored education, many of the developments in educational reform over
the previous few decades had stripped schooling of much of its personal value
both to the child and to the adult. The imagery he chose is particularly
intriguing: state and municipal social welfare evoked 'steam rollers' and 'civil
engineers', while the religious work with which Rowntree was concerned was
described in terms of agricultural imagery—'gardens' and 'fruits'. This work
necessitated the kind of face-to-face charitable endeavour that derived from a
ruralist conception of social relations and a connective educational experience
that the large impersonal organs of the state could not provide.

Joseph Rowntree himself would have concurred with this sentiment. Along
with many of his contemporaries, he tended to idealize rural life, and believed
that one of the greatest threats to social progress was the sundering of country
and town. Hence he subscribed wholeheartedly to the Garden City ethos, and
the construction of the new model suburb of New Earswick fitted with his
belief that 'the residence of town workers in the country would help to bridge
the gulf between town and country interests which for several generations had
been slowly widening'.[76] His view was shared by his son Seebohm, who in his
book on Belgian social conditions, published in 1910 and based on research
funded by the JRCT, looked to the Belgian model of residence in the country
and work in the town as a means of reinvigorating the condition of the British
worker.[77] Joseph himself rented a house in Westow, 11 miles from York, to
which he occasionally retired to write and think, and he was impressed by the
'corporate life' that the village had to offer its inhabitants.[78] At New Earswick
his one outright gift to the inhabitants was the quaintly named 'Folk Hall', at
which folk dancing and other rustic activities were held as well as religious ser-
vices.[79] His pastoralism—one relative remembered his 'almost Wordsworthian

75.   Joshua Rowntree, *Social Service: Its Place in the Society of Friends* (London: Headley
Brothers, 1913), pp. 107-108.
76.   Worstenholme, 'Typescript Memoir', p. K3.
77.   Rowntree, *Land and Labour*, pp. 288-94.
78.   Vernon, *Quaker Business Man*, pp. 145-47.
79.   See the photograph of Swedish folk dancers in Waddilove, *One Man's Vision*, facing
p. 83.

feeling for the countryside'[80]—made some of his projects seem to modern
eyes rather anachronistic, but in fact they drew fully on the guiding assump-
tions of Victorian and Edwardian philanthropic theory.

It is in this context that Rowntree's philanthropy should be viewed. In a
period when contemporaries were beginning to take stock of the rapid
economic and social changes of the previous century, and of the resultant
changes in philanthropic practice, it was regularly remarked by commentators
across the social and political spectrum that the transition to an urban society
had compromised the charitable relationships that had characterized pre-
industrial life. Along with these changes had come a massive expansion in the
role of both the state and local authorities in the provision of welfare, and also
of associated social benefits such as education. Quakers, long interested in the
provision of education for adults, sought to blend their own traditional
concerns with the more general currents of British philanthropic thought, and
in this movement the Rowntree family played a significant, and distinctive,
part. Although the bulk of the money spent by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable
Trust went into experimental projects such as the educational settlements,
these projects themselves had a long pre-history rooted in the development of
Victorian philanthropic endeavour; and hence Joseph Rowntree's early
twentieth-century benevolence, although novel in some respects, bears a great
resemblance to that of the Victorian era through which he had lived.

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80.   Jean Rowntree, 'The Founder's Commission: Some Reflections and Guesses', 19
March 1973, p. 16, in JRCT, *Basic Documents*.