

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The History of Henley Quakers within the Religious Society of Friends. By Mike Macleod. np Skye Publications. 2010. 140pp., illustrations in text. £12. ISBN 978-0-9537252-2-9

This is a fascinating study and has much to teach those of us preparing local Quaker histories. How do you write a meaningful history of your meeting when for long periods there are no records or nothing significant seems to happen? How do you convey to the general reader what you feel to be the essence of Quakerism? How do you make full use of colour and graphic design to produce a book that is a delight to read?

Michael's stated purpose is to place the story of Quakers in Henley within the larger national context, so that the book is not just about local personalities and events but also provides a series of highlights from general Quaker history. Added to this, however, are two unusual features. In an attempt to help the general reader a number of quotations, mainly but not entirely from Quaker authors, and recognisable by the cursive script used, have been scattered through the book to 'recreate the mood of a gathered meeting and provide some focus for a faith which avoids inflexible statements of creed'. Further, because the meeting house garden and burial ground are and have been features important to Henley Friends, the text is enlivened by a series of attractive colour photographs of the grasses and flowers that grow there. Thus, the book can be read on three levels: as a history of Henley Quakers, as a selection of writings for reflection and meditation, or just enjoyed as a work of beauty.

The material is divided into four sections by century. Of necessity there is a broad brush approach, concisely written. Although there is no index, a detailed contents list enables the reader to find their way around. There is a bibliography and all sources are clearly referenced. Extensive use is made of monthly and quarterly meeting records where those for Henley Meeting itself are sparse.

I found the account from the late Victorian period onwards particularly interesting. The coming of the Adult School movement transformed the ailing fortunes of the meeting and provides abundant records for the researcher. Here Michael gives a vivid picture of the new energy and sense of purpose generated in the meeting. From then on letters, photographs and personal reminiscences amplify the meeting's records and take us through the two world wars and up to the present.

I am sure that this attractive and readable book will be treasured by local Quakers and also enjoyed by the general reader. Is this

purely objective historical research? No, I don't think so, but then I suspect that Michael is writing for a much wider audience than the research community. Does the book have value for FHS members? Most certainly yes. Not only does it delight and inspire and challenge us to rethink the way we present our findings, but hopefully it will also provide an impetus for the territory that Michael has begun to chart to be explored still further.

Brian Hawkins

Sarah Biller of St Petersburg A Sheffield Teacher in 19th Century Russia. By John Dunstan. York: William Sessions Ltd. 2009. x, 150pp., illustrated. £8.99. ISBN 978-1-85072-399-8

Sarah Biller (1788-1852) was born into a Methodist family, her father Alexander Kilham was a founder of the Methodist New Connexion. Her stepmother Hannah, known as a pioneering missionary in West Africa, became a Friend in 1803 and Sarah joined Balby Monthly Meeting in 1808. Hannah set up a school in Sheffield in 1806 in which Sarah helped and Mary Howitt was one of the pupils.

John Dunstan goes on to explain the spread of the Lancastrian school movement in Russia and the contacts formed there by the Friends William Allen, Stephen Grellet and Daniel Wheeler. In 1820 Sarah went to St Petersburg to establish a school for poor girls. The complex arrangements of schools set up under the aegis of the non-denominational British and Foreign Schools Society are thoroughly described in the broader context of Russian government and society. There is less firm evidence for Sarah's work and its direct imperial encouragement. Sarah resigned her membership of Friends in 1826 and worshipped thereafter with other protestants in St Petersburg. She became involved in distributing bibles and tracts in Russia. In 1832 she married William Biller and their work together for the British and Foreign Bible Society is described. The book covers her continuing educational and other philanthropic activities. She also compiled a memoir of her stepmother, published in 1837.

Sarah maintained some links with Friends and was buried at the Friends Meeting House in Evesham where she died in 1852. John Dunstan concludes that she was considered a Friend at the time of her death, notices of it appeared in *The Friend* and the *British Friend*.

This book about the unusual path taken by a nineteenth century woman Friend is very thoroughly researched with extensive and helpful footnotes and a long bibliography.

David J. Hall

Joseph Bevan Braithwaite Snr: The Life of a Quaker in the Victorian Age. By Peter Braithwaite. np 2008. 63pp. + chart. Illustrated. £3.50 including UK p&p, obtainable from the author, 38 High Street, Wallingford. Oxon. OX10 0DB

Peter Braithwaite has compiled this account of Joseph Bevan Braithwaite Snr, 1818-1905, with his subject's descendants and their families in mind. It is based chiefly on published sources and benefits from a number of well-chosen illustrations in the text.

Beginning with an interesting account of Braithwaite's childhood and his austere upbringing the author points out that between 1823 and 1829 his mother was away travelling in the ministry for six years and his father for four. His formal education ceased at sixteen yet he became a noted scholar in Hebrew and Greek in the spare time from his demanding legal work (he retired in 1896) and family life which he did not neglect.

Braithwaite should be best known to Friends for his role in the Society. He was recorded as a minister at the age of 26. He was much involved in the work of the Friends' Foreign Mission Association. He invariably attended the Yearly Meeting in London for over 60 years and may have been involved in drafting the Epistle for 40 of those. He managed to travel overseas in the ministry to North America, Western Europe and also with the secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society to the Near East, helping in 1883 to form a monthly meeting in Constantinople. In old age he visited some 300 homes in his own Monthly Meeting.

Quaker controversy was familiar to Braithwaite. His mother had preached against the Hicksites on her first visit to America. He had initially supported Crewdson in the Beacon controversy but remained in the Society. As an evangelical Friend he was a leading member of the Yearly Meeting committee investigating the Manchester difficulty in 1870-71. Then he visited the Richmond Indiana conference in 1887 and was part of the group drafting the Richmond Declaration.

Peter Braithwaite's portrait of his ancestor, though brief, is balanced and conveys the humanity, broad interests, and desire to be a conciliator of someone who might otherwise be seen simply as an unyielding conservative and evangelical Friend.

David J. Hall

Telling tales about men: Conceptions of conscientious objection to military service during the First World War. By Lois S. Bibbings. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009. x+259pp., illustrations in text. £55. ISBN 978-0-7190-6922-2

A senior lecturer in the School of Law at the University of Bristol, Lois Bibbings is critical of standard accounts of First World War conscientious objection such as my *Objection Overruled* (1967), John Rae's *Conscience and Politics* (1970), and Thomas C Kennedy's *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship* (1981). She finds them wanting on the ground that they are all 'based upon one organising story and an argument which is linear (progressing from a beginning, to a middle and, thence, an ending) and often broadly chronological'. Bibbings offers instead what she believes to be 'an innovative approach to historical writing', telling not the story of COs but a number of different 'tales' with contrasting perspectives on 'how objectors were seen and dealt with'.

Ironically, after setting out her anti-linear methodology in Part 1, she begins Part 2 with her own 'brief linear history of conscientious objection, 1914-1918', before introducing six different 'tales' or conceptions in which the objectors are seen in turn as (i) 'despised and rejected', (ii) 'cowards, shirkers and "unmen"' (effeminates), (iii) deviants, degenerates and criminals, (iv) dangerous enemies of the nation, (v) men of conscience, and (vi) 'patriots and heroes'. These 'competing narratives' are the meat of the book, and the different perspectives are well researched, with ample notes and references.

Part 3 (barely three pages, including notes, plus an autobiographical epilogue) is given over to further theoretical explanation and defence of the author's multi-narrative historical methodology. She cites her own legal discipline, where 'different constructions of events and people that run concurrently are central to the practice of law', asserting that 'no one definitive representation of events is possible, although competing narratives can be assessed, criticised and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record'. And again, quoting James E Young, writing on the Holocaust, 'there can be no single way of describing the past... To put it another way, "things happen" and then they "get told" and these are two ontologically separate things "which narrative only *seems* to collapse into a voraciously all-encompassing discourse". Consequently, there is a need to acknowledge "the role of the... narrator", be they historian or social scientist, "in bringing us the facts".'

This kind of multi-perspective history is perhaps a little less innovative and radical than Lois Bibbings suggests, but the contrasting tales serve as a crucial reminder that there is always

more than one way of making sense of historical data. This reviewer, however, would want to assert that linear, chronological story-telling remains foundational, even in postmodernity (or post-postmodernity, which is where I think we are). Bibbings appears to have recognised this with her decision to precede her non-linear accounts with her own well-judged 'brief linear history' in the Part 2 Prologue, and her acknowledgment that 'competing narratives can be assessed, criticised and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record'.

Whether or not Bibbings' historical methodology is as radical and innovative as she supposes. *Telling Tales about Men* is an engaging, informative and stimulating addition to existing literature on the subject. It contains little new material, but familiar facts and viewpoints are presented in unfamiliar contexts. Bibbings recognises but does not exaggerate the important part played by Friends in a diverse movement which included religious fundamentalists as well as modernists, and a political spectrum from Marxists to Liberal radicals. It is a pity that the book's high price is likely to restrict its readership.

David Boulton

Binding the Wounds of War: A young relief worker's letters home 1943-47 from the Friends Ambulance Unit and British Red Cross in North West Europe. By Clifford Barnard. London: Pronoun Press, 2010. 198pp., maps and illustrations in text. £10.95. ISBN 978-0-9556183-6-9

Clifford Barnard's name will still be known to some as an active and well-respected member of the Society of Friends, having held several senior positions on the staff of the centrally-managed work of the Society. This book, his second* about the Second World War, recounts his experiences as a conscientious objector, from the date of his tribunal (to which he was summoned on his eighteenth birthday in July 1943) until his return from Germany four years later in July 1947.

In his introduction to the letters, Clifford Barnard ponders the question 'Would someone, sometime, like to know what it had been like for a typical member of the Friends Ambulance Unit?' The question was answered for him by a reviewer of another book by a Quaker relief worker: 'It is hoped that other Friends have diaries or letters which will help later generations to understand some of the national and personal traumas that characterise the 20th century.' With these words in mind, he has edited and published the letters he

* (*Two Weeks in May 1945*)

wrote to his parents with short interlinking passages, photographs and other illustrations where they were available.

The letters provide a surprisingly coherent account of a roller coaster of experiences from satisfying but exhausting to frustrating and boring. He also feels, at times, overwhelmed, terrified and horrified.

The FAU, despite or perhaps because of the changes to which its members were subjected, was a popular organisation with conscientious objectors, both with Quakers and with those not in membership. 5000 applied to join, 1300 were accepted; 17 lost their lives whilst serving. Clifford Barnard speaks of the deep searching before and after deciding conscientiously that he did object to war. He refers several times to his appreciation of a country which made allowance for these views at a time of national survival and how nationals of other European countries with whom he came into contact were amazed at this degree of tolerance.

The letters start with describing his initial weeks - medical training and an understanding of the operation of vehicles, as well as demanding physical exercise. An 18-mile route march starting at 1 am is mentioned, as well as 'malaria trials'. In one letter there is the laconic remark 'I have been bitten 8 times. I am starting to go a bit yellow'. It was not all tribulation, the Cadburys had put their resources at the disposal of the unit: 'We had a sumptuous tea with the Cadbury family, and a bath in their palatial bathroom'.

When finally sent to Germany, the horrors of warfare are spelt out vividly although one senses that what Barnard experienced was toned down, partly because of censorship of letters and partly because of not wanting to unduly alarm his parents: 'We had 50 stretcher cases at 7pm straight from the battle at Arnhem. Tired and dirty, some not injured, suffering from exposure and exhaustion, tired faces and staring eyes'. He writes of one ward given over to German soldiers 'one of their number being very Nazi' and refusing treatment from the enemy.

A major part of the book describes helping people driven from their homes, just to survive: 'we are surrounded by hundreds of homeless displaced people, there are few usable buildings and no electricity or uncontaminated water' and later 'the surrounding land has been cleared of all the debris of war - what a mess has been left behind. At times electricity did become available but only for lighting and then only spasmodically. Even park benches were chopped up'. We hear how many German people had to live in cellars as their homes had been bombed, how there was little work, limited public transport and no confidence in the currency.

There is much of interest in the book about the ordinary soldiers' contact with local German people, as well as that of FAU members. 'The average Tommy is friendly towards the Germans, giving away their rations though it is illegal'. Even in hospital wards where injured soldiers from both sides were present, he detects little animosity on either side, the German cheerfully responding to being called "Fritz".

This lack of animosity makes itself manifest as Clifford Barnard writes increasingly warmly of a young German woman. One of the last photographs in the book is of their marriage in the register office back in England.

These letters, in direct, simple but powerful language, communicate something of the brutality and of the abhorrent aspects of war, but this last event in the book, the marriage of a young German woman to a young British man, stands for what George Fox described as the ocean of light overcoming an ocean of darkness.

Clifford Barnard refers at the beginning of the book to looking at a pile of ageing letters. This uplifting book is a valuable addition to our knowledge of the contribution those refusing to take up arms made, during the closing stages and immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

Rod Harper

Elfrida: Elfrida Vipont Foulds 1902 to 1992. By Susan V. Hartshorne. York: Quacks Books, 2010. 80pp., illustrations in text. £8.50. ISBN 978-1-904446-26-2

Elfrida is a book about a Christocentric Friend whose life spanned almost all of the twentieth century. She was privileged and born to parents with generations of Quakers behind them. She could remember bonneted elderly women Friends and bearded males; prayer and Bible reading with the servants; William Penn and the Indians, Elizabeth Fry and John Bright pictured on the walls at home. Hers was a world of large houses and Quaker boarding schools. Reading the book caused me to ponder the demography of contemporary Quakerism.

Her niece Susan V. Hartshorne is biographer for Elfrida Vipont Foulds, who was a writer, musician, wife, mother and more. 'She came to her own conviction through the experience of art' a Friend wrote of Elfrida in 1974 and her parents had been of liberal turn of mind at a time of change in Quakerism. In them and the imaginative, artistic Elfrida we see the shift to a Society of Friends in which the Arts were no longer shunned. As she wrote in *The Friend* in 1925 when she was dreaming of a life as a professional singer:

'We may be called to give our testimony in theatre, opera house or concert hall, but in so far as we remain faithful to the Light our service is one with all service for the Kingdom'

Writing, music, Quaker activity and her family were the foci of Elfrida's life. As headteacher (though unqualified) of the evacuation school at Yealand Manor during the second world war her love of music informed what went on there, though the work took its toll of her. Later she turned her evident story-telling ability to good ends, so as to bring to life people from the worlds of music, literature and Quakerism. Sometimes even the *Times Literary Supplement* approved. The BBC dramatized some of her stories and many Quakers now mature in years will have read her tales of Quakerism past. Twice she became Charles Vipont, however (1939, 1955), in an age when publishers thought that adventure stories would sell only if they were written by men.

My adult son easily recalled a story from his childhood entitled *The Elephant and the Bad Baby* and we chanted in unison 'And the bad baby said "Yes", and they went rumpeta rumpeta rumpeta all down the road ... but he never once said 'please'!' This is probably the best known children's tale written by Elfrida (1969), though it is not the one for which she was awarded the Library Association's Carnegie Medal in 1950. That had been *The Lark on the Wing*.

What was her philosophy of writing for the young in particular? The book does not tell us. It brings together a lot of detail about Elfrida's long life yet it misses the opportunity to do more. It does not tell of her response to the evolution of Quakerism in the twentieth century, for example, and I thought that was a pity.

Christine Trevett