

## RESEARCHING 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY QUAKER BUSINESS HISTORY

The Quakers & Business Group (Q&B), a recognised interest group within Britain Yearly Meeting and also a registered charity, has launched a research project. The project's goal is to research Quaker business history in the twentieth century, and to seek lessons from it to apply in the twenty-first century business world.

Quaker economic and business history has been researched up to about the end of the First World War. Emden, Raistrick, Kennedy, Walvin, Milligan, Elliott, Chapman-Huston & Cripps, and others have explored the nineteenth century and earlier Quaker business and economic experience and contribution. A number of studies set partly or wholly within the twentieth century have been completed and published, but no comprehensive study of the post First World War period has yet been attempted.

Q&B's proposal is designed to make a first attempt at filling that space. The overall project goal is to establish how we can promote Quaker business values in the twenty-first century, by learning from Friends' business, economic and concomitant social experiences in the twentieth century. The project outline is as follows:

### **Background**

In the early nineteenth century, four thousand Quaker families ran seventy four Quaker banks and more than two hundred Quaker companies. Straight dealing, fair play, honesty, paying the taxes due on the transactions in question within the jurisdictions where substantively they occurred, accuracy and truth in all things formed the basis of Quaker capitalism.

Just as important to these Quakers families as their values was their vision that wealth creation was for the benefit of the workers, the local community, society at large as well for themselves, the entrepreneurs. The influence and spread of Quakerism in business began a slow decline in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the introduction into UK and USA law of the joint-stock company with limited liability, and as Quaker businesses were sold by their family owners, or merged with other organisations. Some of the original firms grew into global businesses, but Quaker start-ups failed to keep pace with those which exited. The twentieth century saw a continued decline in Quaker businesses and in the number of Quakers following business careers. In the early twenty-first century

the symbolic takeover of Cadbury, in a hostile bid by Kraft, left only Clarks Shoes and Scott Bader (a chemicals company) amongst the few surviving medium to large Quaker, or substantively Quaker influenced businesses.

### Objective

The Quakers & Business Group's purpose is to be the custodian, modern interpreter and promoter of Quaker principles in business and the work place. In order to fulfil this purpose, Q&B feels it is important to understand more fully what happened to Quaker, and Quaker influenced, businesses in the twentieth century, and why their numbers declined. Learning from this experience, Q&B wants also to understand how Quaker values and purposes can most effectively be encouraged in British business today, in the light of contemporary trends in twenty-first century capitalism. Twentieth century Quaker business history has not yet been substantively researched and published, though a number of useful studies, often company focused, have been completed. Therefore Q&B is suggesting that an in depth academic study of Quaker business activity, in the period 1918-2009, be conducted. A possible starting point might include reference to 1918 London Yearly Meeting's publication of the eight Foundations of a True Social Order (QF&P 23.16), as well as the 1918 and subsequent decennial Quaker Employers' Conferences. A possible concluding point might be the hostile takeover of Cadbury by Kraft, and the subsequent impacts of that business change on the two companies at least, set within the wider financial crisis of the time. The research project might be able to discern causes for the decline of Quakers' engagement in business, coming both from within and beyond Quakerism. By studying the wider evolving economic, social, legal and business contexts of these trends amongst Friends, broader lessons may emerge about the recent history of capitalism.

Such research work, will, we believe, provide strong foundations for recommendations and action on how to strengthen the Quaker contribution to business and its role in society in the twenty-first century. Applying such lessons will form the second part of this Project.

### Methodology

Q&B believe the best way to gain this understanding and knowledge as a sound foundation for action, is by commissioning a PhD thesis. The period covered would be from the 1918 Quaker Employers Conference through to the takeover of Cadbury by Kraft and the major debt crisis of 2008-9. The PhD thesis is supported by

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the Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies (CPQS) at Woodbrooke, which has agreed to provide academic supervision through its established PhD studies programme. CPQS will assist also with setting up opportunities for discussion and dissemination of the findings. Q&B, the Edward Cadbury Trust and the Friends Historical Society have now committed financial support.

### Part 2

The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust has expressed interest in funding Part 2 of the project, the dissemination and impact building phase.

*Winston Duguid & Timothy Phillips, Quakers & Business Group.*

(Editor: The Project is now fully funded and further developments will be detailed in the 2013 J.F.H.S.)