

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

*Deutsche Quäkerschriften des 18. Jahrhunderts.* Edited and introduced by Claus Bernet. Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2007. xlvi + 508pp. €98.

Claus Bernet, a member of the German Yearly Meeting, has been working diligently for several years on the history of German Quakers, especially during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and centred on the small community in Bad Pyrmont and the neighbouring settlement of Friedensthal. He has published a variety of articles, mainly in German, but two have appeared in English, one on 'Ludwig Seebolm (1757-1835): Founder of Friedensthal' in *The Friends Quarterly*, XXXIV. 1, 2004, and the other entitled 'Between Quietism and Radical Pietism. The German Quaker Settlement Friedensthal. 1792-1814' in the *Woodbrooke Journal Series*, XIV, Birmingham, 2004. He has also published several articles in the *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*.

The present volume, devoted to German Quaker writings of the eighteenth century, reproduces from microfilm seven works that were published in German between 1792 and 1804. The first was printed in London by James Phillips in roman type, the remaining six in Pyrmont and Friedensthal in gothic. It is not entirely clear why these particular seven texts were chosen for reproduction from a larger number of Quaker works in German that were published in the eighteenth century, but it is good to have them made available for historians. The term 'German Quaker writings' is somewhat misleading in that five of the seven are actually translations from English rather than native German productions, but that reflects the historical situation.

In his well documented introduction Claus Bernet gives an excellent account of the early eighteenth-century decline in the small Quaker communities in Germany and of the tendentious, false information about Quakerism that was current even in an Enlightenment encyclopedia such as Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon*. He deals with the later polemical relationship with Count Zinzendorf's Moravian Brethren based at Herrnhut, and with the establishment, at the end of the century, of Friedensthal in the tolerant small principality of Waldeck-Pyrmont. Each of the chosen texts is then given its own brief introduction. This historical information is important in providing both a specifically German context and reflections on the support that the infant German community received from Friends in Britain and America; Dutch Quakerism was also significant.

In her anthology *Strength in Weakness. Writings of Eighteenth-Century Quaker Women* (Altamira Press, 2003) Gil Skidmore comments on the distorted perception of eighteenth-century Quakerism that historians (not all of them, however) from Rufus Jones onwards have bequeathed us. She herself has done a great deal to correct that picture, and Claus Bernet is part of this trend. It is of considerable interest from the British viewpoint to see what Anglo-American writings were translated. While Robert Barclay and William Penn are names well known to Friends today, those of Joseph Gurney Bevan, Benjamin Holme and Maria Brook will ring few bells despite their being influential in their time. None of them is mentioned in John Punshon's *Portrait in Grey*, the most widely read general Quaker history available today, nor do excerpts from any of their writings appear in *Quaker faith & practice*.

J.G. Bevan (1753-1814), who figures in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* with an entry by David J. Hall, published his *Summary of the History, Doctrine and Discipline of Friends* in 1790 and by 1824 there had been eleven editions in England. A German translation was published in 1792, followed six years later by a new, improved version published in Friedensthal.

Benjamin Holme (1683-1749) was a Friend from a much earlier generation who visited Holland in 1714 and North Germany in the early 1720s. *A Serious Call in Christian Love* appeared first in Dutch in 1725 and in German in 1744, when it was distributed by the American Quaker travelling minister John Pemberton. The Pymont printing is dated 1795, so the tract had a long period of usefulness. It was also translated into Latin, French and Welsh as well as Dutch.

Bernet does not give the English title of Maria Brook's *Gründe für die Nothwendigkeit des stillen Harrens zur feyerlichen Gottesverehrung* (Grounds for the Necessity of Silent Waiting for Solemn Worship) published in Friedensthal in 1803, but it dates from 1774. Numerous English editions were published up to 1877. The German version is based on a translation published in 1786 in Philadelphia by Carl Cist. The author was born Mary Brotherton c. 1726 in Woodstock, married Joseph Brook in 1759 and died in Leighton Buzzard in 1782.

Brook's tract follows in the wake of Robert Barclay's *Ueber Gottesverehrung*, a German translation of the eleventh chapter of his *Apology*. However, it is a new translation, being neither Johann Wilhelm Petersen's version of 1684, nor a second one from 1740. Both Barclay and Brook focus on silent waiting on God, but they are very different in their treatment and style and complement each other. Barclay is systematic and detailed and aims at convincing theological opponents, while Brook directs her urgent and often rhetorical

questions to the individual.

According to Bernet, William Penn is by far the best known and most widely translated Anglo-American Quaker writer in Germany. He and Barclay belong primarily to seventeenth-century Quakerism, but they are the classics of Quaker writing. Penn is represented by quite a short piece, *A Tender Visitation, in the Love of God, that Overcomes the World* (1677), which Bernet slightly confusingly refers to sometimes as *Zärtlicher Besuch* (Tender Visitation) and sometimes as *Zärtlicher Rath* (Tender Counsel).

The remaining two pieces that Bernet reprints are the only native German contributions to the collection. The first is Ludwig Seebohm's *Bemerkungen über verschiedene Gegenstände des Christentums* (Remarks on Various Christian Topics) (Pyrmont, 1794), a considerable treatise a hundred pages in length. The second is a shorter piece, a collaboration between Seebohm and Heinrich Meyer entitled *Unterscheidung des Geistes* (Discerning the Spirit) (Friedensthal, 1804).

This is an anthology that fills a clear gap in what was previously available to German historians and theologians, but it also raises important questions about the transmission of Quaker teaching and experience internationally and the role of the travelling ministry in the nurture and expansion of the Quaker community. It is to be hoped that what Claus Bernet has achieved with regard to Germany in the eighteenth century will prompt scholars to look at the experience of other countries not only in Europe, but throughout the world. The function of translation and the printed word in Quaker history from the seventeenth century to the present day would be well worth exploring in a world context.

*David Blamires*

*Mr. Saffron Walden - the life and times of George Stacey Gibson 1818-1883.* By Jeremy Collingwood. Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd.. 2008. xii + 164pp. £16.99.

Responding to a request for help with rebuilding the church spire in Saffron Walden W.G. Gibson stated that as a Quaker, he could not contemplate helping to build a church steeple, but he would give a donation towards demolishing the old one. This Gibson was George's father. The incident does point to the generous and droll aspects of his father's nature and gives an indication of the kind of atmosphere in which George was raised, in this small market town some 45 miles from London. Quakers were represented there by a strong but not large number (about 50 members) but as has been said

elsewhere about the Society of Friends, their relatively modest numbers belied their considerable influence.

As can be seen Jeremy Collingwood, as if to emphasise this point, entitles his book "Mr. Saffron Walden", a title he confesses would not have pleased George Gibson, who subscribed as much as he did to other testimonies of the Quaker faith, to the witness to equality and the worth of all human beings.

Collingwood says of the Gibson family: "their business instincts compelled them to make money and their faith compelled them to give it away". Gibson inherited and then made, very large sums, and how he spent his money and time are the themes running through this fascinating book. At times his influence and activities are such that it almost seems as if Saffron Walden is run as a kind of religious experiment, along the lines of the early years of Pennsylvania! Gibson's influence seems to run everywhere, and this is evinced by the names of the chapters. The biography is not presented chronologically but chapters are headed after his interests and activities, so we have "the banker", "the landowner", "the Alderman", "the railway man", etc., and there are many etceteras, reflecting this man's extraordinarily full life. The downside of this format is that his personality, influences and interests are revealed in chunks. For example, one only learns at the end of the book that there was only one child of the marriage and she was mentally handicapped. Mr Collingwood speculates, no doubt correctly, that "Gibson and his young bride must have hoped and prayed for the gift of children, and especially a son, who could eventually take over from Gibson his work at the bank and his other philanthropic interests". Excitement in the family, and the wider community, was dashed when a male child was born prematurely and stillborn.

It is estimated that there are over 1500 biographies of notable Quakers on the shelves of the library at Friends House in London. Do we need another? Certainly those looking for spiritual enlightenment will not find it here. Gibson was Clerk of London Yearly Meeting (the prime meeting for church affairs) from 1876-1880, and Clerk of Meeting for Sufferings (executive committee for the Society, acting between Yearly Meetings), but he is peculiarly quiet in his letters and writings about his spiritual life. There are, however, two ways in which both general and Quaker readers may enjoy and find inspiration in the book. Firstly how, given a good nature and plentiful resources, a person can hugely and positively influence a small community, avoiding much of the condescension associated with Victorian philanthropy. The other is a portrait of a small country town as it evolves through the nineteenth century. Mr. Collingwood

is not a Quaker, his interest in Gibson stems from his interest in, and love for, his adopted town. This shows in the many wide-ranging digressions about life in Saffron Walden at the time, for example, attempts to abolish fairs on the common, the administration of the workhouse, working class disturbances and riots.

It seems, though, that anything of significance that happened had the involvement, one way or another, of the Society of Friends and that usually meant George Stacey Gibson. Interestingly Collingwood cites only two anti-Quaker sentiments. Given the influence and power of its members, one feels many more will have been expressed than are recorded here.

This is an engagingly written book, well-researched and indexed, and Mr. Collingwood has provided interesting notes to the main text. There is an excellent bibliography for those stimulated to find out more about the history of the town. There are photographs pertaining both to the Gibson family and the parts of the town associated with them.

*Rod Harper*