

Friends' Reference Library, 1901-1959

Part of an Address given by Muriel A. Hicks to the Friends' Historical Society on 31st March, 1960.

ON the early issues of the *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* was an emblem on which were the words, "the roots of the present lie deep in the past." Anna L. Littleboy in her Presidential address to the Friends' Historical Society, 1920, "A History of the Friends' Reference Library," covers the years from 1673-1901 and demonstrates, through the reading of early minutes, the conscientious care in the collecting of all records, which is still the foundation of this library. This paper is an attempt to survey the developments of the library through its Committee since the appointment of Norman Penney, the first librarian, in 1901, and of M. Ethel Crawshaw, first assistant, in 1903, a record of approximately 60 years.

When the librarian was appointed there was no especial room known as "The Library" at Devonshire House. There were, however, three strong-rooms under his care, one on the first floor opposite the "Meeting for Sufferings Room," the second on the ground floor in the yard, tucked away behind a small cloakroom, and the third below the Recording Clerk's Office, at the bottom of a flight of steep stone steps. The manuscripts and 17th century printed books were in one or other of these rooms, but bundles of manuscripts were also found in cupboards in the "Meeting for Sufferings Room."

The early days of the librarian were spent in the first strong-room upstairs, about 8 ft. × 20 ft. in size. The "Meeting for Sufferings Room," across the landing, had cupboards containing books published after 1700, but it was full of forms, with a long refectory table (now in the canteen at Friends House) and was reserved for other Committees besides Meeting for Sufferings, such as the Friends' Foreign Mission Association, the Home Mission Committee, and the Six Weeks Meeting.

Pressure of space for the librarian, working in a comparatively small room with poor lighting and ventilation, and the need for suitable accommodation for readers,

led the Committee in 1902 to send forward a recommendation to the Meeting for Sufferings "that owing to the more frequent use of the Reference Library (meaning the collection) the want of a suitable room in which Friends may read is increasingly felt. The observance of the rule that Friends shall not be left alone in either of the strong-rooms is often a serious drawback, involving inconvenience and loss of time to the librarian. The Committee feels that the time has come when it may ask the Meeting for Sufferings to allow the use of the Meeting for Sufferings room for the purpose of research and for the conduct of the ordinary work of the librarian, except when the room is especially required as a Committee Room. The Committee therefore suggests that in future the room is called the Library."

The next month the librarian was installed in what henceforth was to be known as the "Library" of the Society of Friends. The minutes of the Committee for some years onwards convey a feeling of excitement and enthusiasm.

THE CATALOGUES

Joseph Smith's *Descriptive catalogue of Friends' books*, published in 1867, was the basis for the catalogue of the library. An interleaved copy, which had already been used by Joseph Smith himself for additional entries, was continued and as items were found the press-mark was inserted in the margin of the page. In 1903 the Committee proposed there should be a card catalogue, "Smith's Manuscript interleaves being less useful," and in the following year, "one oak cabinet (meaning one drawer) for the catalogue" was purchased, to be followed by a second cabinet. This continued until two large trolleys on rubber wheels were built, to contain about seventy drawers. They were taken daily from the upper strong-room across into the library and back again at night and were the foundation of the present catalogue. Smith's catalogue was taken each day to a safe in the strong-room in the yard. Incidentally, the ventilation of this strong-room was also attended to daily by a member of the library staff. Fire precautions at Devonshire House were limited, open fires were in all the Committee-rooms and there were two in the library; the building in general was of course without any of the modern fireproof materials or safeguards, hence the necessity of taking such care of the catalogues.

In 1923, it was reported that there were 70,000 cards and some 200,000 author, title and subject entries.

In the lower strong-room, below the Central Office, wooden boxes contained the great mass of 17th century loose manuscripts, which were for the time being only numbered and placed in portfolios. "Gone through a collection of old manuscripts to be kept in a box labelled A.R.B.;" again in 1902, "Bundles of manuscripts concerning Finland Famine 1857, placed in a box marked 'Finland Distress', " and so on.

Mr. Francis B. Bickley, of the British Museum, was invited to Devonshire House to see the library and its contents. He advised that the binding should be in " $\frac{1}{2}$ morocco and buckram" for all the portfolios of manuscripts, and as for the printed collection, "avoid binding tracts of different sizes together; the dust collects." Advice on the durability of paper and typewriting inks was sought, an enquiry which was made again about forty years later. A small room tucked away was put at the disposal of a binder, a Friend, William Crump, who was a craftsman at his trade, and was set up with the necessary equipment to bind the portfolios of manuscripts and volumes of tracts, as his time allowed, a work which covered many years.

On the purchase in 1903 of the Thompson Collection, collected by Thomas Thompson of Liverpool, father of Silvanus Thompson, which contained manuscripts, printed volumes and a large number of 17th century pamphlets, it was necessary to provide boxes for their safety. The first seventy-five boxes, each numbered, were purchased especially for a pamphlet collection. These were in red cloth. Twenty-eight boxes, in green cloth, for the "Adverse Tracts," each lettered in alphabetical order, were also provided, and guard books for the larger pamphlets and publications were used. The first shelf catalogue for all printed books was completed by 1907. This gave a record, shelf by shelf, of what was kept there.

LOANS OF BOOKS

Just how early books were loaned to readers is not quite clear, but in 1901 it is reported that there were "more books gradually borrowed." Cards stating the conditions of loan were printed. It was then necessary that each borrower should have a member of the Meeting for Sufferings as a

guarantor, and the loan was for three weeks. After a few years this rule was dropped in the case of books but not pamphlets; by 1925 the loans reached to about 350 a year. In 1905 Rufus M. Jones requested the loan of books to America to write an article on Robert Barclay for the *Friends' Historical Journal*, "but the Committee does not feel its way to send books abroad," was the reply to that request.

With the gradual collecting of manuscripts, books and pamphlets, came a policy of thorough completeness, even retrospectively, and the necessity to consider the limits of space and expense did not arise for some years.

Every effort was made to interest Friends in the library and the care of records and to encourage Friends who had papers needed, or books, to present them to the library.

A list of books still required was printed on three different occasions and circulated to preparative meetings, in case copies should be found in a Meeting House library. "At Homes" were held in the library, inviting public librarians, members of the Society of Genealogists, and Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, as well as Friends. A special one was held to "celebrate the binding of the 500th volume of tracts." A pamphlet, "Preserve our History," was published in 1907, and in the same year a Meeting was held in the large Meeting House, where Thomas Hodgkin, Silvanus Thompson and others addressed the Meeting on "Quaker Literature and its Aims." Many exhibitions were also arranged, as opportunity occurred.

This determined effort to collect all material was extended to America. In 1901 Norman Penney wrote to Haverford College for back issues of American Yearly Meeting proceedings. Parcels of books, pamphlets and periodicals were sent each way across the ocean to supply the needs of the respective librarians.

In 1911 Norman Penney visited America and gave a course of lectures on Quaker history and naturally made it his business to contact Quaker libraries. In 1914 and in 1923, the then assistant librarians, M. Ethel Crawshaw and John L. Nickalls, also paid visits to the States under the auspices of a Young Friends visit, but again contacts were made with libraries.

Visitors recorded in the early visitors' book were at the rate of about one a month, sometimes not that, but the

subjects were very much like those today. "Welsh Quakers in America," "History of Adult Schools," "Music a Part of Worship," "Friends in Holland," "Quaker Women," "American Separations." Work on the "Rowntree Series" of Quaker histories was begun and naturally the Library was the place where a great deal of research was done, which lasted for some years. In 1910 Dr. Auguste Jorns, the first visitor from the Continent, of Freiburg University, Germany, arrived; she was sent by her Professor to get material for a thesis on the "Social Work of Friends."¹ The direction he gave her was, "to go to Liverpool Street Station, and having crossed the road to enquire for Devonshire House; if she went through a long tunnel and up some stairs, she would find a door with 'Library' on it. If she went in, some people would help her." The committee was still cautious as to what source-materials Friends could see for their research work. An American Friend came over, to work on a "Life of William Penn." He was allowed access to all Penn material, "but in case he should desire to use hostile literature, the request to be referred to the Committee."

A great deal of genealogical work was done. The registers were housed in the Recording Clerk's office, and had to be carried along the tunnel and up the stairs to the library, which was sometimes quite a heavy task.

As the years went by, the need for further equipment and space was evident. More forms were removed from the library, and book cases erected under the windows around the room. Collections of manuscripts were presented or purchased; for example, "The Thirnbeck Manuscripts," a collection of "Swarthmore Manuscripts" now described in the library as Vol. 7 of that collection, and most notably of all, the purchase, jointly by American and English Friends, in 1920, of the three volumes of Spence MSS., the first two of which contain the manuscript Journal of George Fox, the third a volume of letters. Meeting records from many Quarterly Meetings were sent to Devonshire House under the care of the library.

In 1910 the committee reported, "that notices of the library and some of its principal possessions have appeared in such books as the 'Guide to Manuscript Materials for United States History . . .' 'The Libraries of London' by the

¹ A. Jorns, *Studien über die Sozialpolitik der Quäker*, Karlsruhe, 1912.

Goldsmiths' Librarian, University of London, and the 'Literary Year Book'; the work of this Committee has thus been brought under the notice of a wider circle."

A newscutting service was subscribed to for £3 3s. od. per year. This service gradually extended and became a shared interest for other committees. The picture collection began to take shape, along with the other collections; portraits, pictures of meeting houses, schools, etc., were all pasted into albums. The well-known collection of Spence etchings from George Fox's Journal began by the purchase, by subscribers, of thirty-seven of the etchings. In 1901 the Meeting for Sufferings had to give permission for a photograph to be made for publication of an item in the library! Friends were still very cautious in those days!

The committee, then known as the Library and Printing Committee, had under its care not only the cataloguing of books and manuscripts, but the preparation and seeing through the press of the Society's publications, *Yearly Meeting Documents in Advance*, *Yearly Meeting Proceedings*, and the *Epistle, Book of Meetings*, revisions of the *Books of Discipline*, among others.

The Committee was also responsible for the "Free Grants List of the Meetings for Sufferings." In 1905 there were fifty-five books on the list. They were sent to Meetings in England and abroad, at their opening, to enquirers and to public libraries. The librarian was in touch with the "Continental Committee," and suitable books were translated into French and German. Copies of *Christian Practice* were given to Quaker Chaplains, for distribution to C.O.s in prison during the first World War.

Friends' books for sale in the bookshop (not then owned by the Society), were also part of the committee's work, and great thought was given to the supply of Friends' books that would meet the demand of the public in that way.

By 1918 the shelves in the library were full. There was no space for further book-cases and it was difficult to find space for books as they were added to the library. The files of periodicals and reports of Friends' schools and committees had also increased.

In that year a proposal for co-ordinating the literary work of the Society was brought before Yearly Meeting, and in the following year the Central Literature Council was

established. This actually relieved the library of the oversight of the Society's publications already mentioned. Some of it went to the new Council, and some to the Central Office. The Free Grants list went to the Literature Committee, which later became a sub-committee of the Home Service Committee.

The Library and Printing Committee remained a committee of the Meeting for Sufferings until 1925, when it became a sub-committee of a co-ordinating Literature Committee. Four years later it reverted and again came directly under the Meeting for Sufferings. Meanwhile the name was changed and henceforth it was to be known as the Library Committee.

THE MOVE TO FRIENDS HOUSE

With the possibility of the move from Devonshire House, the expectations and plans for a new library were great. Hitherto there was no classification of books; to meet this, a decimal classification scheme, based on Dewey, was worked out by John Nickalls, the Assistant Librarian, and work was begun on the books a good year before the move in 1925.

A proposal was also made by him for a complete catalogue of printed books, based on the existing entries on the card catalogue, by the incorporation in it of the entries in Joseph Smith's *Descriptive catalogue of Friends' books* (1867). This was accepted, and a beginning made by each Smith entry being pasted on a card.

A new system for recording loans was introduced by John Nickalls in 1924; the necessity for a borrower to obtain a member of Meetings for Sufferings as guarantor was removed, and the books were available to all Friends. Moreover non-Friends, for the first time, could borrow books provided the necessary guarantee was made, and special arrangements were provided for borrowers abroad. This was encouraged largely through the establishment of the work of the Council for International Service, later merged with the Friends' Foreign Mission Association to form the Friends Service Council.

Weeks before the move to Friends House, we began packing in the strong-rooms. Waterproofed lined wooden boxes were provided, and the volumes of manuscripts, and seventeenth century printed books were carefully packed.

Each box contained a duplicate list of its contents. The main library was packed by the movers, and as we left that old room, the empty book-cases were being pulled down around us, bringing with them, it seemed, the dust of ages. Friends House was an uncompleted building when we moved, the library a mere shell, and most of the boxes were taken upstairs into the Institute, whilst the staff found temporary accommodation at the Penn Club (then in Tavistock Square), and later in the Institute. The precious interleaved volumes of Smith's Catalogue, used for reference work, were daily carried from the safe somewhere among the scaffolding at Friends House, to the Penn Club, and back again in the evening.

The actual instalment in the library was about Easter time 1926, and the thrill of placing books for the first time in a classified order, in the new book-cases, was not easily forgotten by us. Naturally, there were alterations and adjustments to be made, but gradually the staff settled down to their new surroundings. The move to Friends House brought with it the strong desire that the work of the Society should progress, and that the new building should be put to the fullest and best possible use, to make known the principles of Friends. Despite the great affection most people had for our old historic site at Devonshire House, it was uneconomic to run, and had many limitations. Now, there was a sense of freedom, even to experiment with new ideas. The Library Committee shared in this, and desired to make more easily available the use of the printed word, especially in a Religious Society which has no paid ministry. Suggestions were made that the library should broaden its scope and take more religious, mystical, devotional and social books. One result of this was that the Industrial and Social Order Committee's library was housed in the library, and later, that of the Penal Reform Committee, and the Marriage and Parenthood Committee, to be followed by others, including a section for "Enquirers" to borrow. Mutual arrangements for loan of books between this library and Woodbrooke were made.

Since coming to Friends House, the library had one strong-room, and shared a second, for deposited minute books. Although still some distance from the library, the convenience of everything being in one room was greatly appreciated. Easy access to these documents and economy

of space was essential, and many schemes were adopted to enhance this, including the refurnishing with steel cupboards.

After the move, the large picture collection from the London Friends' Institute at Devonshire House came under the care of the library. This added considerably to the collection, but still more important was the purchase of certain Quaker pictures as they came to the notice of the library. The care to establish the authenticity of any doubtful picture was the librarian's concern. No longer did the Committee apply to the Meeting for Sufferings for permission for an item to be photographed; indeed, if that were so, much precious time of that Meeting would be used for that purpose, so large has the demand grown. In all this development of the library, the Committee believed it was its main duty to "accumulate and make available material which may be mediated by students for the good of general readers, rather than appeal to these."

The rapid growth of the library during these years, plus correspondence and attention to visitors, with a small staff, was at times overwhelming. For some time the genealogical work was not done by the staff, but someone interested from outside was called in to do it and paid accordingly. Not for many years had the library reminded local Monthly and Quarterly Meetings of the duty to care for their local records, but now an informative document was circulated, enquiring and advising about the physical conditions under which these records were kept—the lack of ventilation and dampness and need of repairs, also the advisability of depositing the records in the local County Record Office, where their own local conditions were not suitable. This led to a great many documents going to the local archives office, by whom a full and detailed list is provided both to the particular Monthly or Quarterly Meeting concerned and to the library.

THE WAR AND AFTER

The outbreak of World War II found the library prepared for action in the case of manuscripts and valuable printed books. It was the policy of the Committee that they should be placed in safe keeping, and four different places in the country were found. Some five hundred volumes were placed in that way, and some 1,000 books from the library taken to

the strong-room. Through the generosity of a Friend, a microfilm of the card catalogue and of certain irreplaceable manuscripts was made and sent to Haverford College. Once again Friends in America came to our aid and collected books, pamphlets and periodicals, to be preserved for the library when the war was over. The work of the library continued very much as usual, with fewer readers. Despite certain difficulties an exhibition was arranged in 1944, open to the public for four days, celebrating the tercentenary of the birth of William Penn. The demand for devotional and mystical books by borrowers increased during the war, and a member of the Committee provided a sum of money for several years which enabled such books to be provided, the Committee feeling that they did not come within their budget policy.

After the war was over, and the books and manuscripts restored to their places, the Committee was faced with the cry of all librarians for space and yet more space! The library was now half as large again as it was in 1924, and the loans increased from 400 to 2,000 a year.

With the sanction of Meeting for Sufferings, second copies of many editions of books preserved by the Committee under its original Minute, "two of all books written by Friends and one against them" were disposed of; this released some 2,000 volumes. Ephemeral periodicals and publications were discontinued, and a policy of careful scrutiny regarding the intake for all the collections, bearing in mind the permanent value of the material, was followed.

WIDER CONTACTS AND CO-OPERATION

In 1947 an exchange of the Assistant staff of Haverford, Swarthmore and Friends House libraries was arranged: each American visitor worked two months here, and I worked two months in each of the American libraries. This valuable intervisitation was a stimulating experience, apart from the knowledge gained of the contents of each library and the methods used.

Mention has already been made of the microfilm. One of the outcomes of this exchange was the much wider sharing of the various Manuscript Collections of each library through the microfilm. To enhance this a microfilm reader was presented to the library by American Friends, "to the

Memory of Rufus Jones." American Friend colleges were not the only concerns interested in this process, but large numbers of manuscripts have been microfilmed for South Africa, Nigeria, Virginia and for many individuals and libraries. Moreover the loan of films to libraries has made it possible for readers to use the manuscripts in that way locally, rather than come to London.

The possession of a film not only safeguards against the complete loss of a manuscript, but has justified the loan of the original manuscript on occasions of particular importance. Thus, after 1949, as the European countries recovered after the war and contacts reopened, the British Council arranged an Anglo-Dutch exhibition in Amsterdam, to which a letter from Margaret Fell to William III was loaned. In this country, during the Festival of Britain, Volume 1 of the Manuscript Journal of George Fox was loaned for eight months to the Victoria and Albert Museum, being one of two manuscripts, in the field of religious literature, exhibited.

In 1928 the library became an "outlier library," to the National Central Library. This last opened the door to the outside world of libraries, and books were borrowed each way. It later became a member of Dr. Williams's Library, and joined the scheme for inter-library loans to reference and university libraries for special books and certain manuscripts, as required. In 1939 it became affiliated to the British Records Association and was also one of the original members of the Standing Conference of Theological and Philosophical Libraries.

A further contribution, in the more national sense, was the library's contribution of a list of well over 400 periodicals held here to the published *British Union Catalogue of Periodicals*.

In the last few years the proposal made to combine Smith's Catalogue with the main card catalogue, has been achieved. By the co-operation of the library, Wing's *Short-Title Catalogue* of English Books, 1641-1700 includes entries for works to be found at Friends House.

Various other schemes for the publicity of the library to Friends and the public were constantly brought forward by the librarian. The routine work with which we were engaged; the constant attention to an increased number of

long-term research workers, some of whom stayed for months, even years; the help given to borrowers; along with the constant planning and adjustment, made the work absorbing and full of interest. Days went far too quickly for the work that had to be done.

Two wars and a growth of interest in social questions has greatly increased the number of students doing research work for advanced degrees and diplomas. For Friends the library has provided the material for their especial interests as they have arisen, through the housing of the particular Committee's library and obtaining on loan books from other libraries. Throughout the years, however, Quaker biographies have been more borrowed than any other class of books.

Despite the amount of material now available and made so easily accessible, the output of Quaker books in this country has declined, for various reasons. The "pamphleteering" age seems to have returned, there are times when the library does not appear to be used either for historical purposes, or for borrowing books, to the extent that it might be, by Friends. In the early part of this century, the library was mainly used by members of the Society, now the far greater use is made by non-Friends, for research purposes.

It has appeared that America, with its larger number of Friends, has supplied a greater proportion of recent books on Quakerism. It may be that in their membership there are a greater number of people more qualified than in this country. It surely behoves more Friends to make enquiries and to see for themselves what the library holds and the need it can supply, for there is much that can be used and put to great service.

LIBRARIANS:

1901-21 Norman Penney.
1921-26 M. Ethel Crawshaw.
1927-57 John L. Nickalls.
1957- Edward H. Milligan.

CLERKS TO COMMITTEE:

1895-1906 Frank Dymond.
1906-47 Anna L. Littleboy.
1948-50 Reginald H. Robson.
1950- Richenda C. Scott.

CONSULTING LIBRARIAN:

1921-33 Norman Penney