

# Quaker Lives

These short biographies of Quakers were compiled by David Purnell (Canberra Regional Meeting) and either recorded for broadcast on *Dove Talk* and/or published in the *Canberra Quakers Newsletter*

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## James Backhouse

The formation of the Quaker movement in Australia was largely due to a visit to the colonies by the British Quaker James Backhouse and his associate George Washington Walker. Their visit was supported by the British Quakers but was by no means confined to encouraging the development of Quakerism: it also included a focus on promoting temperance and on the welfare of the convicts and Indigenous Australians.

James Backhouse was born in Darlington, in the county of Durham in England in 1794, into a well-established Quaker family. Educated at a Quaker boarding school, James then worked in a grocery, drug and chemical business and studied botany in his spare time (notably while he had several winters with tuberculosis). He joined his brother in purchasing a nursery in 1816, and in 1822 he married Deborah Lowe and they had two children. Through his involvement in the Quaker community he came to feel called by God to visit Australia. Through his friend Elizabeth Fry he learned more about her concern for the convicts being sent to Australia. After some years during which James' concern was tested within Quaker meetings, he was offered financial support from London Yearly Meeting. As his wife had died in 1827, his sister offered to care for his children while he went away, and he invited George Washington Walker to accompany him. They reached Hobart in February 1832. (Quote from William Oats – *this we can say* 2.53)

The underlying purpose of the visit was to preach the gospel of Christian love – in other words they saw it as a missionary journey. They arrived in 1831 after a voyage on the *Science*. They had letters of introduction from the British Government to the Governors of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. They began a long series of walks across many parts of the colonies, meeting a wide range of people in all walks of life. They especially held meetings with convicts in road-gangs, partly to preach love and partly to check on their wellbeing and report to the Governors. They also met settlers and were offered hospitality as they discussed the problems facing these people in isolated areas. James Backhouse kept a detailed diary of the trips.

With a deep concern for the convicts, James Backhouse visited many of the penitentiaries, especially in Van Diemen's Land, and spoke directly with Governor Arthur about ways to improve the conditions regarding diet, health, education, employment, and access to religious instruction. They proposed rewards be offered to the convicts to encourage their progressing from servitude to freedom. The Governor came to value these reports, and spoke of Backhouse and Walker as 'individuals unbiased and unprejudiced..(and).. very likely to afford useful suggestions to the local government'. Although not all the proposals for change were adopted, it seems clear that Backhouse and Walker influenced for the better the policies towards convicts at that time. James Backhouse worked in consultation with the Governor and with Elizabeth Fry back in England to seek ways to ensure that future boatloads of female settlers were well cared for and protected during their long voyage. (Quote from Florence James, *this we can say* 3.32)

When meeting Aboriginal people, James Backhouse took an approach similar to that of his Quaker predecessor John Woolman who met with Indians in the USA. Backhouse sought to learn from Aborigines about their customs and attitudes, and treated them more as equals than as inferior savages. He said the following:

'After having seen something of the natives of Van Diemen's Land, the conviction was forced upon my mind that they exceeded the Europeans in skill, in those things to which their attention has been directed from childhood, just as much as Europeans exceeded them in the points to which the attention of the former had been turned under the culture of civilisation...Were the two to change stations, it is not too much to assume that the untutored native of the woods would much sooner learn to obtain food by acquiring the arts of civilisation than the person from the civilised society would by acquiring the arts belonging to the savage life'.

Backhouse and Walker wrote important reports to governments on the state of Indigenous dispossession in Van Diemen's Land, New South Wales and South Australia. Backhouse advocated that Aborigines be given greater protection under the law and that land rights be restored in some way. Although they were not able to influence the direction of many government policies of the day, they provided a valuable contribution towards promoting greater understanding of the ways of Indigenous Australians and the need for the occupiers to give more attention to their needs. (Quote from Backhouse, *this we can say* 5.10)

During their visit, Backhouse and Walker spoke strongly against the impact of alcohol on the lives of many people, and its corrupting influence on the governments in all the Australian colonies. They organised public meetings, issued tracts, and persuaded prominent people to join the temperance cause.

They also encouraged the formation of savings banks, and promoted the use of non-denominational religious text books in schools. When he returned to England, James Backhouse

published a book of his travels – *Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* – and this included valuable botanical drawings of the plants in the places visited. He maintained a close interest in Australia, especially the emerging Quaker groups, and gave Kew Gardens copies of botanical recollections of Australia. He died in 1869.

The first Quaker meetings in Australia emerged in Hobart and Sydney as a result of the visit of James Backhouse and George Washington Walker. The first meetings for worship were held in 1832 in Hobart, and eventually a formal structure was set up.

I acknowledge the following publications in preparing this talk: *A Question of Survival*, by William Oats, and the entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

## Elise Boulding

Sometimes called the ‘matriach’ of peace research, Elise Boulding contributed on many levels throughout her long life. Born Elise Biorn-Hansen in Oslo, Norway in 1920, she moved with her family to the USA when she was very young. They were greatly affected by the German invasion of Norway in World War II, and this experience led Elise to conclude that violence was not the answer to the world’s problems. She became active in the anti-war movement, and joined the Quakers at the age of 21. She had already developed a strong religious basis to her peace witness, and saw the importance of peace as both personal and interpersonal on a daily basis.

It was within Quakers that she met and then married Kenneth Boulding, an English economist with a strong interest in peace. They had five children, and Elise became both a homemaker and activist, especially through her writing on the foundations of peace. In reflecting later on her family life, Elise wrote that she and Kenneth saw the task of their marriage as ‘creating a home of peace from which to help build a more peaceful world’. Having children increased the challenge, but ‘we knew we had to practise at home what we wanted for the world’. She emphasised the role of women and children in the peace process.

After achieving a Masters degree in sociology at Iowa State College, and a PhD at the University of Michigan, she and Kenneth were Scholars in Residence at Dartmouth College. She created the nation’s first peace studies program while chairing the Sociology Department there. Elise’s life encompassed research, writing and teaching, networking and building communities of learning. She is credited with over 300 publications. According to Mary Lee Morrison in a reflection on Elise, ‘her theoretical work on the role of the family in educating toward social change, and the role women have played in peacemaking, together with her ideas on transnational networks and their relationship to global understanding are considered seminal contributions to twentieth century peace education thought’.

Among the associations which were strengthened by Elise Boulding were the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), of which she became international chair, and the International Peace Research Association of which she was a founder. She was a co-founder of the Consortium on Peace, Research, Education and Development, and took a leading role in the International Sociological Association. In the American Association for the Advancement of Science she led work on climate change, population, and arms control. The American Futures Society, the World Policy Institute, and the United Nations University in Tokyo all benefited from her involvement. Within the Quaker movement she was on the board of the Quaker United Nations Office in New York and represented Quakers at the inaugural gathering of the global Interfaith Council. She also helped the American Friends Service Committee develop its policies, and was part of the Committee on Friends Responsibilities in Higher Education and Research.

Her energy seemed boundless, but she periodically used retreats to re-charge. The most significant of these was in 1973 when she spent a year in a mountain cabin near Boulder in Colorado where she began writing her work on the role of women – *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*. The book, published in 1976, explored the changing roles of women over the centuries. She noted that in hunter-gatherer societies women were largely equal with men and had the roles of breeding, feeding and producing. As societies changed, roles became more separate – men’s space was public, women’s private. She considered that the foundation for peace was empowering women to deconstruct a history of patriarchy and construct true equality.

In relation to children, Elise Boulding took the view that they needed to be more valued and included than has been common in our culture. In a lecture to Australian Quakers in 1996, she identified three concepts that have segregated children from adult society – (a) children are weak, unformed human beings who need protection, (b) children’s experience and knowledge are so limited that they have no information or skills of use to adult society, and (c) society is so complex that only specially demarcated spaces staffed by professionally trained adults can prepare children to live in it. She challenged what she saw as a basic disrespect for children, and spoke of the potential to ‘engage jointly with young people in developing the pioneering activities that will make the twenty-first century more peaceful, more just, more fun to live in’.

In a book called *Cultures of Peace* published in 2000, Elise Boulding drew attention to the many examples in history where people have co-operated with each other rather than engaged in war and violence. She saw the task of building a global peace culture as essential for solving international conflict.

Kenneth Boulding died in 1993. Elise continued many of her activities in retirement. In 2000 she was given the Courage of Conscience Award by the Peace Abbey in Massachusetts. She died in June 2010.

References:

*Wikipedia* entry on Elise Boulding

Mary Lee Morrison: *Remembering Elise Boulding, Peace Research Pioneer*

Elise Boulding – *Our Children, Our Partners* (Backhouse Lecture 1996)

Elise Boulding on close relationships, 22.34 of *Quaker Faith & Practice* (1995)

## George Cadbury

The name Cadbury strikes a chord for most people, as it is associated with confectionery, especially chocolate. It is a name linked with the Quakers over many years, and it is an example of how a small family business developed into a large international company. It was started in 1824 by a young Quaker, John Cadbury, in Birmingham, England. At that time, Quakers had few professions they could enter because of their beliefs being non-conformist, so business was one avenue where they excelled. Quakers came to be prominent in the chocolate business – with names Fry, Rowntree and Cadbury. By 1831 the Cadbury firm had changed from a grocery shop to a manufacturer of drinking chocolate and cocoa. Today it is part of the Cadbury Schweppes company.

George Cadbury was a son of John and Candia Cadbury, and was born in 1839. After being educated in Quaker schools, George and his older brother Richard took control of the company. At a time when the business was flagging, they took a risk and were the first to sell cocoa – the beans were roasted, winnowed, ground and then mixed with sugar to make chocolate powder. The resulting drink became very popular, and sales increased rapidly, beyond England to Europe and North America. It also happened to be at a time when the quality of food products was being scrutinised, and the Quaker products passed all the tests. Late in 19<sup>th</sup> century the company introduced Cadbury’s Dairy Milk using fresh full cream milk, and this became the country’s largest selling chocolate bar.

Despite the demands of a growing business, George Cadbury was committed to spending time helping those less privileged, and he said ‘we can do nothing of any value to God except in acts of genuine helpfulness done to our fellow men’. On Sundays he taught classes at the Birmingham adult school, which was non-sectarian.

In 1879 a new 15-acre factory site called Bourneville was purchased outside Birmingham, and in due course over 300 houses were built for the workers. A school, hospital, reading rooms and wash-houses were built for the people of the village. Sporting and recreational facilities were provided, working hours were shortened, medical and dental treatment were offered, and a food canteen was added. Workers were able to gain access to holidays, trips, educational courses and

savings schemes. George's wife Elizabeth was an active participant with him in the planning of the village.

Despite some controversy within the Society of Friends about the ethics of business practices such as advertising, the Quaker chocolate businesses managed to combine promotion with an emphasis on the good quality of their products. Of course, as the industrial practices changed, the paternalistic approach of the Quaker entrepreneurs was challenged to some extent, and labour unions came to exert more influence.

George Cadbury extended his interests well beyond business. He represented the Liberal Party on the Birmingham Town Council and Worcestershire County Council. He purchased a newspaper and campaigned for old age pensions and against sweated labour. He built a large building on his estate where entertainment and food could be offered to about 25,000 children from deprived areas of Birmingham once a year. He took an active anti-war stance against the Boer War and helped form the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) at the beginning of the First World War. This became the largest anti-war organisation in Britain.

Here are some of the quotable comments made by George Cadbury:

In an interview in 1898, he said: 'Largely through my experience among the back streets of Birmingham I have been brought to the conclusion that it is impossible to raise a nation, morally, physically, and spiritually in such surroundings, and that the only effective way is to bring men out of the cities into the country and to give every man his garden where he can come into touch with nature and thus know more of nature's God'.

In a speech to the Trade Union Congress in 1905, he said: 'The evils of poverty will never be cured by the prohibition of liquor or of betting – the twin curses of Britain today. Even if these evils were prohibited, other evils would arise while men live in the depressing and demoralising surroundings they do. True radicals must go to the root of the matter, that is, I believe, land monopoly'.

In an interview with Bishop Gore he said: 'I have for many years given practically the whole of my income for charitable purposes, except what is spent upon my family. Nearly all my money is invested in businesses in which the first thought is of the welfare of the people employed'.

He died in 1922 after a life of unusual vitality and breadth of concerns.

References: The National Archives Learning Curve in UK, and the book *Quakers, Morals and Money* by James Walvin.

## **Pierre Ceresole**

Pierre Ceresole was born in 1879 at Lausanne, Switzerland. His father Paul was a colonel of the Swiss army, a judge in the Federal Court and for a time president of the Swiss Federal Council. Pierre had six brothers and three sisters, and sadly lost his mother Secretan when he was nine years old. He had a good education initially in classics and then studied mathematics with a plan to become an engineer. By 1908 he was lecturing at the Federal Institute of Technology of Zurich.

Pierre was not attracted by wealth or position, and gave the state the money he inherited from his father as he felt he did not deserve it. In 1910 he undertook a long journey through the USA, working in a variety of manual jobs, as well as teaching French at a university in Hawaii. He then went on to Japan in 1912 and worked as an engineer in the Kobe branch of a Swiss company Sulzer. When war broke out in 1914 he returned to Switzerland. He became more and more disillusioned by the misery and madness of war, and thought it was appalling that Christians allowed themselves to be used for the war, thereby making the nation-state into an idol.

He joined with those who were conscientious objectors to the war. Although poor health saved him from being called up as a soldier, he decided to refuse to pay defence tax and made his decision public, saying that it reflected his Christian conscience. As a result he was imprisoned, the first of ten such episodes during his life. He managed to continue teaching at a private school for two years in between periods of imprisonment. In 1919 he gave up his career as an engineer to work full time for peace.

Pierre Ceresole became aware of the Quakers during this time, and admired their efforts to make pacifism a reality in daily life. He accepted the idea that young people needed to be trained for peace instead of for destruction. He soon found an opportunity to put this into practice, by going with several other pacifists and volunteers from Germany, Austria, England, Holland and Switzerland to an area near Verdun in France that had been a battlefield in the war. They cleaned the debris of war and built new houses. This was the first example of non-military national service, and even his brother Ernest, a colonel in the Swiss army, joined in the five-month work group.

In 1920 this movement became known as *Service Civil International*. In the years that followed, there were 32 work camps in response to crises such as avalanches, floods, and earthquakes. The countries included Switzerland, France, England, Lichtenstein, and eventually India. Many hundreds of volunteers were engaged in these projects. Pierre met Mahatma Gandhi in India, and later acted as interpreter for him during a visit to Lausanne.

It was in 1936 that Pierre Ceresole decided to join the Religious Society of Friends, after many years working alongside Quakers. This step accorded with his strong conviction that the only salvation open to humans was to have the courage to go further seeking truth. He saw fear for oneself as the greatest enemy – fear of changing, fear of parting with money, fear of death. In 1937 he explained his approach to life in these terms:

Reduce and simplify your material needs to the point where you can easily satisfy them yourself, so that those who live for the Spirit and claim to live for it do not correspondingly increase the material burden weighing on other people, cutting them off from the possibility or even the desire to develop their spirit also. (*Quaker Faith & Practice* (Britain Yearly Meeting), 23.15.)

On another occasion, he said of children:

Speak to each child as if you were addressing the utterly truthful upright individual which under your guidance he may one day become. (*Quaker Faith & Practice*, 23.78)

As World War II began, Pierre was maintaining his witness against war. He published so-called confidential material from official military sources that showed the real extent of the horrors of war, and found himself in gaol once again. Around this time he married Lise David and their home became a centre for meetings of pacifists and others keen to stop the war. Despite failing health, Pierre attempted to enter Germany to confront German leaders and persuade them to end the war. He was captured and put in prison. Shortly after his release, he died (1945). In a prayer he wrote shortly before his death, the following words appear:

Lord, that your Spirit inspires us and guides us, that your will is done.

Give us the force to carry out our task without pride, without egoism, without laziness and without cowardice....

Learn us to collaborate wholeheartedly, without self-interest, dirty selfish ambition, and without narrow-minded vanity, in the common search for truth.

*Service Civil International* celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010, and one event was the retracing of Pierre Ceresole's journey in 1933 from Switzerland across the border into Germany, a trip he did many times. CSI is today one of the largest international volunteer organisations, dedicated to promoting a culture of peace through practical work and exchanges.

#### *References:*

Alfred Manuel, Biography of Pierre Ceresole (*Vivre sa Verite*, Switzerland, 1950).

Service Civil International, website, and document on its founder Pierre Ceresole.

*Quaker Faith and Practice* (Britain Yearly Meeting), 23.15 (1995).

## **Adam Curle**

Adam Curle was a peacemaker without peer. He worked tirelessly to create harmonious relationships at all levels – personal, interpersonal, community, national and international. He was born Charles Thomas William Curle in July 1916 in the town of L'Isle-Adam north of Paris. He

came to be known by the name Adam, taken from his birthplace. His father Richard was a journalist and writer and a close friend of the novelist Joseph Conrad. His mother Cordelia was famous by association, as her sister Adeline married the composer Ralph Vaughan-Williams. Adam's mother sowed the seed of pacifism in his mind, as she had lost three brothers in war.

Adam studied history and anthropology at Oxford University, and joined the army, serving in World War II. He was never afraid for his own safety, and this stood him in good stead in his later role as a peacemaker in dangerous situations. He came gradually to a strong commitment to peace. Near the end of the war, he became involved in the Civil Resettlement Unit to help resettle prisoners of war. This gave him insight into the psychological trauma of war. After the war he worked from 1947 to 1950 at the new Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London. Then in 1950 he accepted a position of Lecturer in Social Psychology at Oxford, and in 1952 he moved to Exeter University as Professor and Head of Education and Psychology.

His personal life had changed too. He had married Pamela Hobson in 1939, and they had two daughters, Christina and Anna. The marriage ended after several years, and in 1958 Adam met and married Anne Edie from New Zealand, and they had a daughter Deborah. Anne had been working as a community health officer in East Pakistan, where Adam had gone to advise the Pakistan Planning Commission on Social Affairs in 1956.

From 1959 to 1961 Adam Curle was Professor of Education at the University of Ghana in Africa, travelling extensively to develop education, social and development plans. It was in Ghana that Adam and Anne joined the Religious Society of Friends, which became a critical part of their lives. They moved to the USA where Adam took a position with the new Harvard Centre for Studies in Education and Development, and he stayed from 1962 to 1973. This drew him into the area of understanding conflict and how to create the conditions of peace. He again travelled widely - in Nigeria, Tunisia, Central America and Barbados. Between 1967 and 1970, he served as a mediator in the Nigerian Civil War and also in the Pakistan-Indian war.

British Quakers were instrumental in setting up the first chair of Peace Studies at a university, and Adam Curle became the first Professor at Bradford University in 1973. In his inaugural lecture he adopted a comprehensive definition of what education for peace should entail, and he published extensively on this theme for many years. He emphasised that the peaceful response to any conflict begins with each individual, in their heart and mind, and this then leads to outward action. He demonstrated in his life the connection between the international and the local – being a mediator in international conflicts whilst also working at grass roots level to educate and encourage others in the ways of peace. The Bradford course included practical experience 'in the field' as part of its expectations of the students. In 1981 he wrote as follows:

'I am as much concerned with the human condition in general as with specific conflicts, which often represent only the tip of a pyramid of violence and anguish... I am concerned with all the pain and confusion that impede our unfolding and fulfilment... In this sense the social worker, the teacher, the wise legislator, or the good neighbour is just as much a peacemaker as the woman or man unravelling some lethal international imbroglio'. (*Quaker Faith & Practice*, 24.35).

When he left the university job in 1978, Adam Curle continued his many peace interests, often under Quaker auspices. He became a peacemaker in areas of conflict such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and the Balkans. He wrote and spoke about what he called the 'tools for transformation' which included mediation, problem-solving, negotiation, policy analysis, advocacy, and non-violent activism. In Croatia he was the inspiration for the Osijek Peace Centre, and he was awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize in 2000.

Adam was a deeply spiritual person, with an interest in Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama as well as Quaker life and thought. He appreciated music, played the flute, and was a keen gardener with his wife Anne. His personal warmth and wisdom were appreciated by all who met him. The University of Bradford School of Peace Studies has continued to flourish since his early initiatives, and remains the largest of such centres in the world.

Adam Curle died in 2006 at the age of 90. He left a legacy which included the acceptance of peace and conflict research as a legitimate academic pursuit, and led to the expansion of peace studies

programs around the world. He impressed many people with his charismatic commitment to peace and love for all humanity. His approach was summed up in a statement he made in 1990:

'The effects of our actions are largely beyond our control. Any happening they may influence has multiple causes that can never be unravelled....we must have faith that if we purify our hearts making our motives more compassionate, what we do will strengthen unimaginably the great forces that can save humanity'.

#### *References:*

Tom Woodhouse (Bradford Peace Studies), Obituary for Adam Curle (2006).

Barbara Mitchels, blog in October 2006.

*Quaker Faith & Practice* (Britain Yearly Meeting, 1995).

*this we can say* (Australia Yearly Meeting 2003), 3.5

## **Margaret Fell**

Margaret Fell was one of the most prominent and significant of the early Quakers, and was known as 'the mother of Quakerism'. Born Margaret Askew in 1614 in Lancashire, England, she married Thomas Fell who became a judge and Member of Parliament. Their home, Swarthmoor Hall, was often managed by Margaret Fell during Thomas' absences as a circuit judge. In 1652 George Fox – at that stage an itinerant preacher with no organised following – came to Swarthmoor Hall. Margaret Fell and her daughters and servants became convinced of the truth of his spiritual message.

Here is what she wrote later about that encounter:

...he said how Christ was the light of the world and lighteth every one that cometh into the world, and that by this light they might be gathered to God.. and he said.. you will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this, but what canst thou say?

Margaret Fell was challenged by this and saw that the Scriptures had been used as words only without awareness of the Spirit behind them. She was convinced of what George Fox was saying. With the support of Thomas Fell who was sympathetic to the cause, Margaret Fell made Swarthmoor Hall a centre of Quaker activity. She served as unofficial secretary for the movement, receiving and forwarding letters from travelling Friends. She also wrote many epistles herself, and handled funds. After Thomas Fell died in 1658, Margaret Fell continued with her Quaker work, despite harassment from government forces. She often interceded on behalf of Quakers who were arrested or persecuted.

In 1660 Margaret Fell was the principal author of a Declaration by a group of Friends, including George Fox, to King Charles II supporting freedom of conscience in religious matters. The Declaration said in part:

We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity; it is our desire that others' feet may walk in the same, and do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars and contentions...

This Declaration was the basis of the Peace Testimony of 1661 which stressed that Quakers wanted to see change but would use only non-violent means to achieve it.

In 1664 Margaret Fell was arrested for failing to take an oath of allegiance and holding Quaker meetings in her house. Here is how she described the experience:

They said – if I would not keep meeting at my house, they would not tender me the oath. I told them I should not deny my faith and principles for any thing they could do against me, and while it pleaseth the Lord to let me have a house, I would endeavour to worship him in it. So they caused the oath to be read, and tendered it to me, and when I refused it...they made a *mittimus* and committed me prisoner to Lancaster Castle...

She remained in gaol for 4 years, during which time she wrote religious pamphlets. The most notable of these was called *Women's Speaking Justified: a Scripture-Based Argument for Women's Ministry*. Eventually she was released by order of the King, and married George Fox in 1669. They spent little time together, as they each focused on the urgent work they felt called to do. George Fox went to America on a religious mission, and was imprisoned on his return in 1673. They did manage to spend some time together at Swarthmoor Hall developing the structure of the Quaker movement.

After George Fox died in 1691, Margaret Fell continued to be active in the Society of Friends. She was still alive when a measure of legal tolerance of Quakers was achieved. She died in 1702. Her influence on the emerging Quaker movement was vital, and she put much energy into ensuring its solid establishment with firm principles and clear structures. Throughout she insisted on the grounding of Quakerism in prophetic Christianity, and stressed that corporate unity was to be directed by the Spirit.

Let me end with another quote from Margaret Fell herself:

The Truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power and spirit of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge the writings of Bill Samuels, and the Britain Yearly Meeting publication *Quaker Faith and Practice* (1994) for some of the content of this presentation.

Additional references:

Margaret Fell's Red Dress –story by Martin Kelly's blog (The Quaker Ranter)

Margaret Fell Fox – brief bio plus photo

Swarthmoor Hall – photos etc taken in recent days.

Bill Samuels' review of a book about Margaret Fell edited by Terry Wallace.

Wikipedia entry

Doug Gwyn report of her conviction etc.

*this we can say* entry by Margaret Fell about her arrest (marked)

*Quaker Faith & Practice* entries 19.46 (statement to Charles II) and 19.61 (Truth).

## **Elfrida Vipont Foulds**

Born in 1902, Elfrida Vipont Foulds was youngest daughter of Edward Vipont Brown, a medical doctor in general practice, and Dorothy Crowley – both Quakers. She had two siblings. She attended the Mount School – a Quaker establishment in York, England. Her parents were very keen on theatre, music and art, at a time when many Quakers had their doubts about the value of the arts to someone with religious convictions.

Elfrida trained as a professional singer in London, Paris, and Leipzig, but was unable to develop a long-term career in that field. In 1926 she married a research technologist, Percy Foulds. They had four daughters and she started writing in 1930 when the children were small. During World War II she was Head of a Quaker school in Lancashire. The school was a refuge for children from the bombed cities of Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds. Elfrida found the teachers, brought professional musicians who created a children's orchestra, and sustained the children with her own story-telling.

Her Quaker life included service with the Friends Education Council, which was established in 1931 to support the development of Quaker schools in Britain. She was on the Committee of Ackworth Friends School, and wrote a history of that school. In addition, she was part of the Friends Service Council, the relief and peace agency of British Quakers which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for its worldwide work in assisting refugees and building international understanding. She was on the Library Committee and a member of the Friends Historical Society. She was active in the work of the London Yearly Meeting, including as executive committee clerk,

and helped in the process of revising its book of discipline. She also wrote a number of books about the history and practice of Quakerism in Britain and beyond. Examples were *George Fox and the Valiant Sixty* (1975), *Let Your Lives Speak* (1953), *Quakerism – A Faith to Live By* (1966), and *Why Young Friends?* (1987).

Yealand Conyers in Lancashire became her home. That part of England, known to Quakers as the 1652 country, was where the movement started. In 1952, the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Quakerism, she and others began a program about the area that has become a regular feature of Quaker education. Visiting Quakers from many parts of the world can come to a greater appreciation of the significance of those early locations of the movement – Pendle Hill, Swarthmoor Hall, Firbank Fell, and Brigflatts.

Inspired by the Lancashire landscape, Elfrida Vipont Foulds wrote more than 40 books, many for teenagers and children. The most well known set are *The Lark in the Morn* (1948) and *The Lark on the Wing* (1950), which focus on the story of young Quaker Kit Haverard who seeks a musical career despite many obstacles. The second of these books earned her the Carnegie Medal in 1950. One of the most favourite of her children's books is *The Elephant and the Bad Baby* (1969), with illustrations by Raymond Briggs. The story is about a baby and its elephant friend who go out on a romp in the town, until the elephant decides the baby is not polite enough and must be brought home for pancakes.

Another focus of her writing was stories about people in the arts – Henry Purcell the composer (1931), and authors Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte (1966) and George Eliot (1970).

After her husband died in 1954, Elfrida made her living by writing, despite bouts of poor health. In addition, she was an inspiring lecturer, speaking about her books and on Quakerism. She became a well-loved speaker at Quaker gatherings in Britain, USA, Australia and New Zealand. In 1987 she was given an honorary degree from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana USA, and the citation said in part: 'you have given the personal witness of a lifelong search for and commitment to the truth'.

The full story of her life was published in 2010 by Susan Hartshorne, a British Quaker who is niece of Elfrida.

#### *References:*

Wikipedia entry about Elfrida Vipont Foulds.

Facebook page about her.

Dictionary of Literary Biography – biography of Elfrida.

Paul Lacey, review of Susan Hartshorne's book, in *The Friend* (30 Nov 2010)

## **George Fox**

George Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), was born in Leicestershire, England, in 1624 and lived until 1691. He kept a Journal of his experiences. He was shocked by the failure of those who claimed to be Christian to live up to Christian standards. He became disillusioned and searched for spiritual help from many different people for four years. He turned inward and heard a voice telling him that Jesus could speak directly to his condition. He also saw a vision of an ocean of light overcoming an ocean of darkness.

For several years George Fox travelled widely around England, at a time of great upheaval when the monarchy had been replaced by Oliver Cromwell, and found many people who were in unity with his message. In 1652 he went up Pendle Hill in Lancashire and preached at length, attracting many followers. His message was that God spoke directly to people without intermediaries like priests. Other significant parts of his message were –

- There is that of God in everyone
- Peace and holiness go together

- God's power is over all creation
- It is the inward life that is most important: outward ceremony and creed are not sufficient
- Personal integrity and truthfulness are essential
- The leadings of the Spirit are more vital than the words of Scripture
- Men and women have an equal place in the movement.

George Fox was imprisoned for several years for his unorthodox views, and many other early Quakers had a similar fate. During one such time in prison, George Fox wrote to others in the Quaker movement as follows:

Keep in the wisdom of God that spreads over all the earth. Spare no place, spare not tongue or pen, but be obedient to the Lord God and go through the world and be valiant for the Truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under .... Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them: then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

The Quaker movement grew rapidly. Some Quakers, notably William Penn, went to the American colonies and set up Quaker communities. George Fox visited them, and in his Journal records the experience of a trip in Virginia:

In this voyage we met with foul weather, storms, and rain, and lay in the woods by a fire in the night. Here lived a Friend called the widow Wright. Next day we had a great meeting in Nancemum, of Friends and others....After the meeting, we hastened towards Carolina, yet had several meetings by the way.. a very good meeting we had at William Yarrow's at Pagan creek, which was so large that we were fain to be abroad, the house not being big enough to contain the people. A great openness there was, the sound of truth spread abroad...

Later he speaks of another meeting.

The governor, with his wife, received us lovingly; but a doctor there would needs dispute with us. And truly his opposing us was of good service, giving occasion for the opening of many things to the people concerning the light and spirit of God, which he denied be in every one, and affirmed it was not in the Indians. Whereupon I called an Indian to us and asked him whether when he did lie or do wrong to anyone there was not something in him that did reprove him for it. He said there was such a thing in him...so we shamed the doctor before the governor and people.

These extracts from his Journal give something of the flavour of George Fox's amazing commitment and determination to engage with others about the truths he had discovered for himself. He continued as an inspiration to the Quaker movement throughout the rest of his life, and he shared some of his remaining years with his wife Margaret Fell, another vital contributor to the early Quaker movement.

I conclude with a comment from William Penn about George Fox:

He had an extraordinary gift in opening the Scriptures. He would go to the marrow of things and show the mind, harmony and fulfilling of them with much plainness and to great comfort and edification. But above all he excelled in prayer. The inwardness and weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his address and behaviour, and the fewness and fulness of his words have often struck even strangers with admiration, as they used to reach others with consolation.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge the publication *Quaker Faith and Practice* (Britain Yearly Meeting 1994) for some of the material used in this presentation.

Additional references:

His Early Life: Extract from Wikipedia entry, (also photo).

Quaker Reader (p. 47) has more about his 'seeing the light' (Christ speaking to his condition).

Margery Post Abbott (A Certain Kind of Perfection) – comment at beginning of chapter on George Fox (p. 115)

Douglas Gwyn (Seekers Found) – see quote about theology of Fox (marked)

Wikipedia also has a section on how the Society took shape.

## Elizabeth Fry

Elizabeth Fry is best known for her work to reform the prison system in England. She inspired other women to play a fuller role in the wider society beyond their important role in the home. Elizabeth was born in 1780 to a wealthy Quaker family – her parents were Joseph and Catherine Gurney. At that time the Quaker movement was in its 'quietist' phase, consolidating rather than reaching out. It was therefore something of a shock to other Quakers that members of the Gurney family wore fashionable and colourful clothes rather than the Quaker grey that had become the norm.

Elizabeth (or Betsy as she was often called) was encouraged by her mother to become educated, and she learnt history, geography, French and Latin, unlike most girls of her time. She kept a diary from a young age. She accompanied her mother on visits to the sick and poor in the district. Her mother died when Betsy was 12, and this was a major blow. As she struggled to decide on her right path in life, Betsy was influenced by a number of experienced Friends – notably William Savery and Priscilla Gurney. She wrote around that time of her uncertainty about the course to follow, and of her desire to do right in everything. As a result she developed an acute sense of her calling to live her faith through practical help to others. She began running a Sunday School in her family home. Many of the children she taught were from poorer areas and some even worked in factories.

Elizabeth married Joseph Fry in 1800, and found in him a husband who supported her working outside the home. The Fry family were wealthy tea, coffee and spice merchants, and Elizabeth found it hard to get on with them at times, as her own sense of social justice was emerging. Initially she focussed on her family, and she had twelve children over a period of 20 years, and was fortunate to have servants and sisters to help in the household. Fearing that she might become 'the careworn and oppressed mother', Elizabeth started visiting the Islington Workhouse (which provided work and shelter for the destitute). She taught the children there. She also became more active in the Society of Friends and travelled extensively among Friends.

In 1812 Elizabeth was approached by Stephen Grellett, a Quaker who had become alarmed by the awful conditions of prisoners in the women's prison at Newgate. Elizabeth immediately started sending warm clothing and asked other Friends to make baby clothes. Elizabeth and her sister-in-law then visited the prison and persuaded the authorities to let them see the women there. The conditions were indeed desperate, so Elizabeth began visiting regularly with clothing and clean straw for the sick to lie on. The authorities feared that she would be in physical danger because the prisoners were wild and savage, but Elizabeth went calmly to meet the women and was well received. She prayed with them and they were more moved by her words of love for them.

Two of Elizabeth's daughters, Katherine Fry and Rachel Cresswell, later spoke of her work in the following terms:

She encountered in the prisons every grade and variety of crime: the woman bold and daring and reckless, revelling in her iniquity and hardened in vice, her only remaining joy to seduce others; the thoughtless culprit, not lost to good and holy feeling nor dead to impression from without; and lastly the beginner, she who from her deep poverty had been driven to theft or drawn by others into temptation. Elizabeth Fry marked all these and despaired of none amongst them.

Seeing the opportunity to do something constructive, Elizabeth worked with a group of Quaker women, and with her husband's support, to establish a school in the prison. Following initial opposition, the authorities accepted the plan. The group became the Association for the

Improvement of the Female Prisoners at Newgate, funding the appointment of a matron, and organising for materials to be provided so that prisoners could sew, knit and make goods for sale. They visited the prison regularly to read the Bible. Eventually the Lord Mayor of London saw what was being done and agreed to pay part of the matron's wages. Drawing on her experience within the Society of Friends and with the prison, Elizabeth Fry gave evidence to a Committee of the House of Commons in 1818 on the lives of the prisoners, and recommended that useful employment be maintained, and that supervision be done by women not men. Because of the depth of her knowledge and commitment, she exerted considerable influence on public policy.

Elizabeth Fry then turned to the treatment of prisoners sentenced to transportation to the colonies, including Australia. Her first step was to arrange for prisoners being transported to be taken to the docks in closed carriages to protect them from public ridicule. Then in the time before the ships sailed, Elizabeth and her Association visited the prisoners to give them a 'useful bag' of things they would need on the journey – such as patchwork for quilts.

There seemed to be no end to the areas of practical support that Elizabeth Fry gave. She set up societies for helping the poor and homeless, libraries for coastguards, and a training school for nurses. The new Prison Act of 1823 was influenced by her advocacy. She travelled widely to report on her knowledge of women in prison, and this led to initiatives being taken in other parts of Britain and in Europe. She became a strong opponent of the death penalty. She paid a price for her public role, as even among the Quakers there were those who questioned her for seeking too much publicity and not using funds properly. She herself said in 1844: 'The more I have been made much of by the world, the more I have been inwardly humbled'.

This is David Purnell. I am indebted to an article in the American journal *Quaker Life* for much of the material used in this presentation.

Additional References:

Setting up the prison school, (p.4) in paper by Quaker Home Service. Later the comment by June Rose (p.5). James Walvin *The Quakers* has an entry on p.131 about her personal difficulties. *Quaker Faith & Practice* para 21.30 contains an interesting querying of Friends' attitude to the arts.

## Donald Groom

One of the strongest advocates of nonviolence, Donald Groom, contributed much to the life of the Australian Quaker movement, even though his time here was short. He was born in England in 1914, a few months before the outbreak of World War 1, and his early life was greatly affected by his father's decision (as a Quaker) to be a conscientious objector and the consequent ill-treatment his father endured. He became aware of the importance of valuing each person. He studied accountancy and secretarial work through the Co-operative Movement and took university tutorial courses through the Workers Educational Association.

After Donald attended the international Young Friends Conference in 1938, he felt led to offer for service in Spain during the civil war to help children and infirm victims. He then moved to Paris to become Director of Relief for Spain. He met there a young Indian who spoke of Gandhi's efforts to achieve independence for India through nonviolent means, and this inspired Donald's interest. He married Erica Hodgkin (another Quaker) in 1939 and they went together to India in 1940, where they served until 1956, when Erica returned to England with their three children (all of whom later moved to Australia).

Donald became closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi, learned Hindi, and took responsibility for the rural development work at Rasulia Friends Centre. He helped plan the World Pacifist Meeting in India after Gandhi's death, and launched the Fellowship of Friends of Truth – an attempt to bring members of several great faiths of India into a union of hearts. After the family left he spent five years working with Vinoba Bhave in the Land Gifts Movement, and walked over five thousand miles during that period.

When Donald returned to England in 1961 he spent time as Field Secretary for the Friends Peace Committee and as General Secretary of the National Peace Council. He campaigned for funds to assist Indian land-gift villages with vital works such as seed banks, water supplies and equipment

for village industry. He also undertook two lecture tours of the USA for the American Friends Service Committee. (Quote from *This we can Say* – 3.104)

In 1970 Donald and Erica moved to Australia and Donald became the first paid secretary for Australian Quakers. His skill in communicating with others, and inspiring young people especially, soon became evident through his presence among Friends and others in Australia. Through schools for nonviolence he helped many who were facing conscription under the National Service Act. He encouraged greater awareness of Asia and of Indigenous Australians. He had a genuine humility that enabled others to fulfil their potential.

Tragically, Donald Groom was killed in a plane accident near Delhi in 1972, while visiting India en route from London where he had been attending meetings of War Resisters International and helping plan the Friends World Committee's international meeting to be held in Sydney in 1973. Typically, his Indian stopover had been so that he could meet Indian leaders whose friendship he had earned over the years. Tributes flowed from around the world.

In reflecting on his life, Donald Groom said in 1970: 'I only had a strange sense of call which gave me a certainty that the future would unveil itself step by step. It was my membership of the Society of Friends which made it possible for me to find a channel of expression.'

Donald's approach to nonviolence was based on a firm view that war and preparation for war brutalise all involved, and that nonviolence expresses the worth and dignity of people. He saw nonviolence as requiring an act of faith based on a belief in the responsiveness of others to an appeal to their higher selves.

In her biography, *Peace Comes Walking*, Victoria Rigney says:

Donald constantly balanced silence and speech, action and reflection. He struggled also with the dilemmas of commitment to family and to public life; to the village as opposed to the city; to politics and religion; to large-scale development and conservation; to elected government and popular movements.

After his death, Australian Quakers established a Donald Groom Fund to promote nonviolence especially in the Asia-Pacific region, and this has continued to support significant and often radical initiatives by individuals and groups over the years.

This is David Purnell. For this talk I have used material published in the *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*, the British Quaker journal *The Friend*, and the biography by Victoria Rigney *Peace Comes Walking*, published in 2002.

## Ham Sok Hon

A very significant Quaker in the Asia-Pacific region was Ham Sok Hon, who lived a life of continuous suffering and poverty as a result of injustice, but remained a soft and gentle person free from anger or resentment. He was born in North Korea in 1901 in a very poor farming and fishing community. His father was a herbal doctor, and his mother was illiterate until she learned to read after joining the Presbyterian Church. She raised silkworms and wove cloth for the family. Ham attended Pyongyang State High School, which could have led to a safe and prosperous future in a country, which was then under the control of Japan.

However Ham became a student activist when he joined the Independence Movement against Japanese colonial rule at the age of 18. As a result he was expelled from school. He chose not to return to school when invited, and committed himself to a new life. He went to Japan to study in 1923, and returned in 1928 to teach history at Osan High School. But he maintained his opposition to Japanese rule and refused higher positions that would have guaranteed a secure future. He protested at the continuing suppression of Korean culture. He was imprisoned four times for his anti-Japanese activities, and apart from his own suffering in gaol, his family suffered the absence of a husband and father.

When Korea was liberated from Japanese rule in 1945, Ham was appointed to a leading education position in North Korea, advising the government. However he would not co-operate with the interim Soviet military government and was wrongly accused of organising a student uprising. He

was severely beaten and nearly executed by a firing squad before being imprisoned again. After being released, he escaped to South Korea in 1947. Even there, however, he was imprisoned or put under house arrest because of his pro-democracy stances and activities for human rights through his writings and public speeches. He established an outspoken monthly magazine called 'Voice of the People'.

In an interview he gave in 1984, Ham explained why he had joined Quakers in 1967:

Just after the Korean War in 1953, the British Friends Service Council and the American Friends Service Committee helped with the work of rehabilitation of our country. While helping to reconstruct a hospital destroyed during war in Kunsan, they organised a work camp in which several Korean youth participated. This was the first project administered by the Quakers in Korea. Some young Quakers were participants in the work camp as well. I met the Quaker participants and was impressed with their beliefs. Because of this I became interested in Quakerism and later became a Quaker.

In the same interview, Ham spoke of his attitude to religion as follows:

Before I became a Quaker, reading Tagore gave me a more universal viewpoint. Many insist that their own religion is the source of absolute truth. I don't accept this because Truth is not expressed to any one person or organization absolutely. Is it possible that great religious truths can be contradictory? I don't think so. Many people have different views on this but this is my view. I intentionally mentioned Laotse and Chuangtse as often as I can. Our history is one of suffering. Because of our history, I have mentioned Laotse and Chuangtse.

Ham Sok Hon held to two principles – freedom and love. He was committed to socio-political democracy and to tolerance of all religions. He was nominated by western Quakers for the Nobel Peace Prize. At a conference of social workers in Seoul in the 1980s, Ham impressed an Australian Quaker, Red Mitchell, with the following words – 'Is your comfort of more importance than my words – Jesus came to teach you love. I have come to teach you hate – to hate luxuries, to hate comforts – to hate your importance'. According to Red Mitchell, there was complete silence and deep listening as Ham spoke.

As well as attending the Quaker Meeting in Seoul from 1961, Ham visited Pendle Hill Quaker Study Centre in USA and Woodbrooke Quaker centre in the UK, as well as taking part in several international Quaker gatherings. He became known in Korea for praying for those of all faiths and those imprisoned for their beliefs. In 1976 he and 17 others were arrested for publicly criticising the government and calling for freedom and democracy. He was interrogated and sentenced, but his detention was suspended because of his age. He was confined in his movements after then, but continued to speak fearlessly. When the Olympic Games were held in Seoul in 1988 he convened the Seoul Assembly for Olympeace which drew up a declaration calling for world peace, and which was signed by more than 600 prominent citizens, including world leaders and Nobel Peace Prize winners.

Ham died in 1989. In 2000 he was selected by the Republic of Korea as a national cultural figure to be posthumously honored. To mark this the Ministry of Education published 20,000 60-page booklets about Ham and distributed them to all Korean middle and high schools in 2001.

*References:* Kim Sung-soo, Council for the Korean Pact in Anti-Corruption and Transparency.

*this we can say*, entry 5.60 (Red Mitchell).

Interview by Han Yong Sang, 1984

Yoon Goo Lee, *Ham Sok Hon, A Wandering Albatross*.

## David Hodgkin

One of the most prominent members of the Australian Quaker movement was David Hodgkin. Born in England in 1914 to Quaker parents Elspeth and Edward Hodgkin, he was surrounded by a strong Quaker community in Darlington, and attended Quaker schools. He then studied for a year at Cambridge University, but preferred business and worked in several firms for five years. In 1938

Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia challenged his ideas about pacifism and he decided he should join the army. When Prime Minister Chamberlain announced he had made a pact with Hitler for peace, David stopped his efforts to be recruited. However when war did become imminent he decided to offer for service at the Friends Centre in Vienna, especially to help Jewish refugees. His Quaker faith was strengthened by the commitment to this work

It was in Vienna that David Hodgkin met Brigit Kelsey, another British Friend, and they married in Hampstead Friends Meeting House in 1940. In 1941 they became the first wardens of the Friends International Centre in London, and apart from making it an important meeting place for Friends, they assisted refugees for the remainder of the war. After the war David took up international affairs as a study, believing in the need to be better informed, and graduated from the London School of Economics. His idea of working for the United Nations did not come to fruition, as their quota of UK officials was filled, so he responded to Sir Walter Moberley's book *Crisis in the Universities* by becoming Assistant Registrar of Hull University College.

In 1953, attracted by the creation of a new university in a new country, David and Brigit moved to Australia, where David took up the position of Assistant Registrar of the Australian National University in Canberra. They and their three sons (who had been born in England) were founding members of the Canberra Quaker Meeting. David served for 22 years, the last five as Registrar. Despite periods of disappointment in his job, David always felt that he had done the work to which he felt called, and he was honoured by his academic and administrative colleagues on his retirement as 'a great servant of the University'. The Chancellor of the University spoke of him as 'quiet but assured and above all accessible to those who have needed him ... someone who was able to see the whole wood as well as the trees and been guided by a firm sense of the fundamental purpose for which the university exists'.

Outside of his work, David Hodgkin contributed much on the wider scene, being active in the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the Churches Commission on International affairs. Within the Quaker movement he played a very important role in the Canberra Meeting, as well as nationally. He played a leading role in the transition of the Australia Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends from being part of the London Yearly Meeting to becoming an independent Yearly Meeting in 1964. He was involved with the Board of the Friends School in Hobart. He spent some time at the Quaker United Nations Program in New York and Geneva and convened several diplomats' meetings in Canberra to encourage dialogue on current international issues. After he retired from the ANU in 1974 he became Yearly Meeting Secretary until his death from leukaemia in 1977.

David Hodgkin was a seeker in the fullest sense. He was an inspired listener and wise counsellor to many. He was thorough in his knowledge of and commitment to the principles of the Society of Friends. In a lecture he gave in 1971, he spoke of having been through a period of spiritual dryness and of having had an experience of renewing his faith after reading Eric Fromm's book *The Art of Love*, and especially the section on the love of God. He said:

There is a constant challenge to us to make the most of our opportunities, both so that we may become more complete persons ourselves and so that the Society may prove powerfully attractive to those drawn to it.

He described what he felt were the precious characteristics of the Society of Friends as follows:

It is based on the experience of the presence of God rather than on accepting statements about God;

It seeks truth from wherever it comes;

- It builds on the good in people, not denying evil but believing they will reject evil if we have faith in their potential for good;
- It believes that faith impacts on all our life;
- It is universal and open to all seekers;

- It is a caring community that seeks to create a better world.

There are two contributions from David in *this we can say* (1.96 and 3.69) which express David's insights into Quakerism.

David Hodgkin epitomised Quaker traditions through conscientious and creative performance of duties and responsibilities.

References:

*Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*, and the booklet *Quakerism: A Mature Religion for Today*, by David Hodgkin.

## Florence James

Florence James is best known as a novelist, editor and reviewer. Her name became associated in the public mind with Dymphna Cusack through the publication of their novel *Come in Spinner* which won the *Daily Telegraph* prize in 1948. In her obituary in *The Sydney Morning Herald* after she died in 1993, it was stated that Florence was

... one of the most honourable of human beings. A feminist, a pacifist and a Quaker, she lived her life according to her principles. She was one of the most creative and constructive contributors to the Australian literary culture and a generous and charming friend.

Born in 1902 in New Zealand, Florence moved to Australia in her childhood and attended Sydney University as an arts student. There she met Dymphna Cusack, and together they challenged the imperialistic nature of the curriculum, performed in the dramatic society and supported each other's writing aspirations. Florence received the University Medal for her honours thesis in philosophy. Florence then went to England, where she became a journalist and literary editor for some years, and during this time she interviewed such public figures as Neville Chamberlain, Virginia Woolf, and Maria Montessori. She married Pym Heyting, a Dutch lawyer, and they had two children. She and Christina Stead, the Australian writer, had a close friendship at this time. She returned to Australia in 1938.

During the war, Florence lived with the children and without her husband who was serving in the air force. She edited a magazine for Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and organised charity balls. She and Dymphna Cusack developed the idea of a novel about the way the war had thrown decent people off balance, and about its tragic impact especially women. They meticulously collected stories and wove them together in a novel – *Come in Spinner* - that had a significant effect on readers of the time. The publishers were unwilling to print the unabridged version at first, because of its alleged 'coarseness' and because it showed some Australians in a bad light. Eventually, Florence James edited the 1989 version of the complete novel, and it was used as the basis for a TV series.

After the war Florence James returned to England, and her marriage came to an end in 1948. She continued her editing work with the publishers Constable, and later Richmond Towers and Benson, and in this role she was able to promote many Australian women novelists, including such people as Mary Durack, Nancy Cato and Nene Gare. She also wrote for *The Times Literary Supplement*.

It was while in England that Florence James became a Quaker, and became more active in her peace witness. This led to a short stay in Holloway prison in the 1960s, following a sit-in organised by Bertrand Russell's Committee of One Hundred. She took advantage of this time in prison to become informed on the poor treatment of women sentenced for petty crimes.

Florence James returned to Australia and became one of the first to join the newly formed Australian Society of Authors in 1963. She continued to champion women authors. It was a blow, however, when she realised that Christina Stead, with whom she had been friends for many years, used her as the basis of a most unattractive character in one of her novels. A more fortunate development was that the woman who had been housekeeper for Florence James and Dymphna Cusack during their time writing *Come in Spinner* took their advice and wrote her life story (later a film) called *Caddie*.

Within the Society of Friends, Florence James became known for her regular annual presentation at the Yearly Meeting gatherings summarising the epistles sent from other Quaker groups around the world. She served in various capacities, such as on the Backhouse Lecture Committee which commissioned annual lectures of relevance to Quaker thought and practice. She was a founding member of the Blue Mountains Local Meeting in NSW. In her later years she spent much time reading and still offering support to other writers. She took an interest in Quaker history, and wrote this of the founders of Australian Quakerism, James Backhouse and George Washington Walker:

What an indefatigable pair they were. Their concern for the convicts, for settler both bond and free, and for the Aborigines, never faltered: and overall they discharged with devotion their duty of Christian love.

Florence James died in 1993, just before her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday.

References:

*Sydney Morning Herald's* obituary, *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*, *this we can say*, the website *Australian Women*, and an article called 'Friends No More', about the friendship of Florence James and Christina Stead, by Sandra Hall.

## Rufus Jones

In the first half of the twentieth century, there was an American Quaker who made a substantial contribution to the development of Quaker thought and practice – Rufus Jones.

He was born in 1863 into a Quaker family in Maine, USA, and experienced in his childhood a solid example of religious life from those around him, especially his aunt Peace and uncle Eli who travelled widely as Quaker ministers. He later recalled an incident when, instead of being punished in the usual way for a misdemeanour, he was taken by his mother to his room where she prayed with him.

He attended Haverford College in Pennsylvania and graduated with a Master of Arts degree in 1886. He obtained a further MA from Harvard University in 1901. From 1893 to 1912 he was editor of the *Friends Review* journal. He taught philosophy and psychology at Haverford College from 1893 until his retirement in 1934. He became well known as a Quaker historian and theologian, and was well known as a visiting lecturer at Pendle Hill – the Quaker residential community in Pennsylvania.

In 1917 Rufus Jones helped found the American Friends Service Committee, following an earlier initiative he had taken at Haverford to set up a relief agency. In 1927 he visited Asia and met people in Japan, India and China, including Mahatma Gandhi. His trip helped develop his idea that missionary work should give priority to humanitarian aid while respecting other religions and not aggressively converting people. In 1938 he went with other Quakers to Germany to seek a peaceful way of dealing with the Nazis.

Among Friends, Rufus Jones sought greater unity after the damaging splits in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among American Quakers. His focus on religion as a way of life helped many Quakers to see a vision of a positive spiritual movement that was concerned about faith, peace and justice. He saw the importance of seeking divine inspiration to make us loving and in fellowship with others in a sense of community. In affirming the value of the Quaker approach to mysticism, Rufus Jones emphasised that its aim was to become more aware that the human spirit and the divine Spirit can be in communion. He also saw that mysticism flourished best in a group. In a talk to Young Friends in 1918, he said:

I shall consider religion...as a way of realising and fulfilling life, a way of finding the whole of oneself, the discovery of infinite interior dimensions and possibilities, the finding of almost inexhaustible resources and supplies of power for the continual expansion of personal capacity....

In his early years, Rufus Jones became used to the family ritual of observing silence before meals, and saw these moments as very significant in his spiritual development. He later spoke of silence

as having the potential to be 'an intensified pause, a vitalised hush, a creative quiet, an actual moment of mutual and reciprocal correspondence with God'.

Rufus Jones was to experience several personal crises. He was married in 1888 to Sarah Contant, and their son Lowell was born in 1892. Sarah died of tuberculosis seven years later, leaving Rufus to care for his son. The boy developed diphtheria and, when he appeared to recover, Rufus decided to leave him in the care of his grandmother while Rufus travelled to England to the opening of the new Woodbrooke Quaker College in Birmingham in 1903. During the trip he became troubled, and then felt a presence and a sense of reassurance. He later discovered that his son had died at that time, and as a result he formed a strong conviction of the capacity of love to span separation.

Along with other Young Friends in America, Rufus Jones was instrumental in building support for an international Quaker body, and this led to several international conferences (1920 and 1937) and the formation of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) which continues its work today. When asked to chair the 1937 world conference, Rufus Jones expressed his anxiety at the effectiveness of large gatherings, and spoke of pinning his hopes to 'quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place'.

Harry Emerson Fosdick listed Rufus Jones' accomplishments as (a) the leading historian of Mysticism, (b) a great teacher of philosophy, (c) a reformer of the Society of Friends, (d) the outstanding leader in the extension of Quaker service around the world, and (e) an interpreter of vital religion to multitudes in many countries and all churches.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge the following writings in preparing this talk – *Pendle Hill*, by Eleanor Mather, *A Certain Kind of Perfection* by Margery Post Abbott, Jim Rose on an internet blog, *The Quaker Reader* (edited by Jessamyn West), *Quaker Spirituality* by Rick Moody, and Britain Yearly Meeting's *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

Additional references:

*A Certain Kind of Perfection*, p.230/1; *this we can say*, p.12 (1.17); *Quaker Spirituality*, p. 130, re his Aunt Peace, & p.135 re the bible; *Quaker Reader* p. 433, re his views on mysticism.

## Muriel Langford

I want to share something of the story of an unusual member of the Society of Friends in Australia – Muriel Langford. Born Muriel Webb in London in 1913, she was the youngest of five children in a materially poor but loving family. A scholarship girl, she completed high school and worked in a factory then as secretary to an American mining magnate, learning skills which prepared her for a lifetime of political lobbying later. She attended the Derby Road Methodist Church and married another Methodist, Bernard Langford, in 1936. They took a strongly pacifist stand and during the War typed letters smuggled from prison by conscientious objectors who were being tortured. The letters were sent to politicians and this ultimately led to improved conditions for the objectors.

Bernard lost his bank job because he was a conscientious objector, and he began training as a missionary while Muriel worked as a housekeeper. In 1943 Muriel heard a radio appeal by the Anglican Missionary Society for business people to volunteer as hospital managers in Asia. Bernard and Muriel saw this as God's call and eventually were able to obtain a passage to India in 1944 where they served for 11 years. By the end of that time they had four children, and had fallen in love with the rich Indian culture. Muriel became fluent in Hindi, Telugu and French.

In 1955 they moved to Tasmania where Bernard was ordained an Anglican priest. Muriel became involved in parish matters. In 1957 Bernard was appointed Queensland Secretary of the Australian Council of Churches. In Brisbane Muriel quickly came into contact with Aboriginal people, and among them found a spiritual and emotional home. Muriel at first helped Joyce Wilding to raise funds for a hostel for Aboriginal people. However, Muriel was caught up in moves (inspired behind the scenes by the Queensland Police) to close down the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in favour of a new group OPAL (One People of Australia League) which they hoped to control. Muriel later regretted her role in all this.

It was at this stage that Muriel came upon the Society of Friends, which hosted many of the Aboriginal meetings in Brisbane. Muriel worked with others, including Neville Bonner and Jackie Huggins – both significant in the Indigenous movement – to help raise Indigenous confidence. She helped set up homework classes, organise housing, jobs and transport, and she attended courtrooms when asked. She was particularly active in the lead-up to the 1967 Federal Referendum which gave the Commonwealth Government power to include Aborigines in the census for the first time, and power to act in other ways on behalf of Aborigines. Muriel got publicity by personally visiting managers and editors of the media, and even got support from the Police Commissioner and State Governor.

In 1970 the OPAL organisation purchased a motel property on the Pacific Highway at Upper Mount Gravatt in Brisbane's outer suburbs and converted it into a home for Aboriginal children from ages 4 to 15. It was a successful venture and another example of Muriel's foresight.

Muriel made a deep place in her life for the presence of God, spending several hours each morning with her Bibles. She became dissatisfied with the hierarchy and sexism of mainstream churches and in 1982 joined the Religious Society of Friends. She served on the Quaker Race Relations Committee, was a member of the Fellowship of Healing, and edited the Queensland Friends newsletter. She also faithfully attended the fortnightly silent hour for peace sponsored by the Friends Meeting in the middle of Brisbane.

One of Muriel's legacies was the establishment of the Brisbane Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Independent Community School which began in 1986. It grew steadily from those beginnings. (Quote from *this we can say*, 5.24) In addition Muriel offered encouragement to many Aboriginal people to develop skills and pursue goals in business and political life. Her commitment was ongoing and solid over many years, and this was evident after her death when over 100 Aborigines attended her memorial meeting at the Friends Meeting House in Brisbane.

At the age of 65, Muriel graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in French and Anthropology, and began a part-time job editing a magazine and annual report for the Queensland Canegrowers Council.

Muriel Langford was passionate in her demand for justice. Her approach at times created difficulties for Friends and others, but she remained an adventurer in every way – geographically, culturally and spiritually. She suffered a stroke in 1998 and had a difficult few years without much movement and speech. She died in January 2003, after a long and remarkable life. (Quote from *this we can say*, 5.73)

This is David Purnell. In this talk I have used material mainly from the *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*. I also referred to a report from the journal *New Dawn* in 1973.

## **Kathleen Lonsdale**

Until fairly recently, science was largely the province of men – now the situation has almost reversed. Kathleen Lonsdale was an exception in her day as a scientist of considerable note in Britain. Born Kathleen Yardley in 1903 in Northern Ireland, she was the youngest of 10 children, some of whom died in infancy. Her father Harry was a postmaster, and from him Kathleen developed a passion for facts. Her mother Jessie was a strong character, committed to the Baptist Church, and the children were brought up accordingly. The family moved to Essex in England because of the Irish 'troubles', and Kathleen attended a Girls School at Ilford, at the same time taking classes in physics, chemistry and higher mathematics at the nearby boys' school – the only girl to do so.

With a scholarship earned for her excellent studies in geography, Kathleen attended Bedford College of Women in London to study mathematics at the age of 16. She then obtained a university scholarship to focus on physics, and although she studied hard she also found time to cox a rowing crew and join a music society. Graduating top of her class in 1922 with Bachelor of Science honours, she found a place at the research group run by WH Bragg, a crystallographer, and her research concentrated on molecular structures. She subsequently moved to University College, London, where she met her future husband Thomas Lonsdale. They married in 1927 and moved to Leeds. It was there that Kathleen made her greatest scientific contribution by showing

that the benzene ring, a most important compound on organic chemistry, is flat, and she worked out its dimensions.

During her time in Leeds, Kathleen became attracted to the Quakers, being convinced that war was evil. This led her to refuse to register for civil defence duties in World War II, and as a result to be confined in Holloway prison for a month. This was a difficult time for her, with heavy work cleaning and scrubbing, but it was eased somewhat when the prison governor allowed her access to her scientific books to work on in her cell. After she left she became committed to improving prison conditions, and persuaded the authorities to make numerous changes. She also became a prison visitor. Reflecting later on her decision to take a stand, and the impact on her three children, she said:

I had wrestled in prayer, and I knew beyond all doubt that I must refuse to register, that those who believed that war was the wrong way to fight evil must stand our against it however much they stood alone, and that I and mine must take the consequences. The 'and mine' made it more difficult, but I question whether children can really suffer loss in the long run through having parents who are willing to stand by principles...

In the 1930s and 40s Kathleen worked at the Royal Institution in London. This led in 1949 to her appointment as Professor of Chemistry and Head of the Department of Crystallography at University College, London. During this period she worked on the constitution of bladder and kidney stones, and edited the International Atlas for X-ray Crystallography, the standard work in the field. She was one of the first women to be elected to the Royal Society (1945), was first woman president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and in 1965 was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

Kathleen took the view that, as a scientist, she had much more to understand, and that two apparently irreconcilable ideas indicated the opportunity for new knowledge about life.

Kathleen spoke at times of the difficulty that women had in balancing family responsibilities with the work of a scientist. She was a strong advocate for special support being given to women to return to the workforce after caring for children, just as soldiers were helped to return to civilian life after war.

Thomas and Kathleen worked together on many peace concerns over the years. Kathleen was articulate in her advocacy of a nonviolent approach, saying in 1953:

Christ was crucified. Gandhi was assassinated. Yet they did not fail. Nor did they leave behind them the hatred, devastation and bitterness that war, successful or unsuccessful, does leave. What can be claimed, moreover, is that this method of opposing evil is one of which no person, no group, no nation need be ashamed, as we may and should be ashamed of the inhumanities of war that are perpetrated in our name and with our support.

Kathleen became ill with leukaemia in 1970 and died in 1971. She is remembered in her home County Kildare in Ireland by the Lonsdale Prize awarded to the student obtaining the best first class honours degree in chemistry.

She was honoured further by the name Lonsdaleite being given to a rare form of diamond found in meteorites.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge the writings of William Reville (University College, York) and the publication *Quaker Faith and Practice* for material presented in this talk.

Additional references: *Quaker faith & Practice*, 20.26 and 26.23; Howstuffworks entry about her scientific significance.

## Francis Mather

Joseph Francis Mather was born in 1844 in Hobart, son of Quakers Joseph Benson Mather, a tailor, and his wife Anna Maria Cotton. He was educated in Hobart and then worked on his grandfather's country estates, had a brief period with an architect and was an agricultural apprentice at Ross before joining the family clothing business in Hobart, becoming a partner and then eventually the proprietor after his father's death in 1890. He married Margaret Lidbetter in

1874, but sadly she died in 1876. He was a generous employer, and his character and integrity won great respect in the business community. He served on the Hobart Chamber of Commerce, the Savings Bank, the Tourist Association and the Sanitary Association which sought to conserve the natural beauty around Hobart. In keeping with his strong religious convictions, he represented Hobart Friends on the Council of Churches, and was for many years secretary of the Hobart branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

From its early days, the Australian Quaker movement had shown interest in education. The idea of setting up a school had been discussed, partly with the encouragement of English Friends who saw a need for a school in the colonies. An abortive attempt was made in Victoria, but this faltered as Friends saw the easy access of state schools and the likely expense of their own school. Joseph Mather, Clerk of the Hobart Quaker Meeting and father of Francis, then became the central figure in the move to establish a school. He started with a night school for boys, and supported other initiatives to help delinquent boys get training and education. He became concerned at moves by the Government to institute militia training for school students, and he saw this as against the peace testimony of Friends. The Hobart Quakers decided to set up a committee in 1885, with Francis Mather as secretary, and this led to close consultation with English Friends about appropriate funding and staff for a school in Hobart.

Samuel Clemes, a British Friend, was appointed Principal of the School, and his progressive ideas on education, including co-education and an opposition to homework, received strong support from Francis Mather as chair of the Committee. The object of the school was to 'secure a superior guarded and religious education for the children of Friends and others in accordance with the Christian principles of the Society of Friends'. Francis Mather himself had a clear commitment to a non-secular, non-sectarian institution which stressed both knowledge and character. The school had immediate success, attracting many non-Friend students. In his role as chair, Francis continued for many years to advise the School in a modest and self-effacing way. In many ways, the school was a living monument to his efforts.

An example of the way Francis Mather approached difficult issues was his response to a request from old scholars of The Friends School who wanted to erect an honour board for those former students killed in the First World War. Despite his own pacifist beliefs, he recognised the genuineness of the sentiment, and agreed to the board being placed in the School with the following inscription: 'They followed where their sense of duty led'. At the same time he ensured that the School made clear in its public image that it opposed war, did not have a cadet corps, and discouraged celebrations of victory.

Within the Friends Meeting, Francis Mather was an acknowledged minister, and he often spoke of the gradualness of religious growth. To him the Bible showed the unfolding of the righteousness of God. He was also very committed to nonviolence and peace, believing that 'war and all violence are contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ'. Another area where Francis Mather made his mark was as the first editor of *The Australian Friend*, a Quaker journal that sought to link Friends across Australia. Through that vehicle he wrote extensively on such topics as education, militarism in schools, the history of Quakers in Australia, and contemporary issues. He combined the intellectual and the spiritual in his writings and throughout his life.

Francis Mather married Margaret Thompson, a cousin of his first wife, in 1905. There were no children from either of his marriages. He died in 1925. He was remembered in a leader in the Hobart *Mercury* as 'the good citizen' and for his 'nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love' (a phrase from Wordsworth).

References: *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*, and William Oats' book *The Rose and the Waratah*.

## Lucretia Mott

Lucretia Mott was one of the outstanding figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Quakerism and in the abolitionist movement, the peace movement, the women's movement, and the campaign for religious freedom.

Born in 1793 in Nantucket USA, Lucretia Coffin grew up in a family which was involved in the trade in oils and candles. She often helped her mother in the business when her father was away on a long voyage. Her parents had a high ideal of education and usefulness for a daughter. She spent her early school years in Boston, and was sent to a Quaker boarding school in New York State when she was 14. She became a teacher and moved to Philadelphia, where she married James Mott who worked in the business with her father. Following the death of her father she and James had to assist her mother in the family responsibilities and they tried several different businesses. She had six children, and put more emphasis on helping them read than learn to sew.

Within the Quaker movement, Lucretia and James followed Elias Hicks during the split that occurred in 1827 from the evangelical Friends, and she became a minister for the Hicksite branch of Friends.

Lucretia's strong faith in the Quaker tradition led her to commit herself in a more public way to causes such as the support of women's rights. She said that 'The highest evidence of a sound faith being the practical life of the Christian, I have felt a far greater interest in the moral movements of our age than in any theological discussion'. She followed the ancient Quaker testimony of refusing to bow to the religious or secular institutions of her day, and took a prophetic stance which from time to time put her in danger from such quarters as pro-slavery mobs. She was even threatened with expulsion from the Society of Friends for heresy when she was seen as coming too close to Unitarianism, which had influenced her thinking.

Lucretia was committed to temperance, peace, and support for the poor. But perhaps her most passionate efforts were directed towards the abolition of slavery. She saw slaves as the most oppressed group in America, and set out to plead their cause and to gain their emancipation. She endeavoured to avoid products grown under slavery, and the family business sought to deal with cotton goods unstained by slavery. She and her husband sheltered runaway slaves. In 1834 the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society was founded, and Lucretia travelled many miles around the country to make clear the demand for the abolition of slavery throughout America. She also attended an Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, but was shocked that women delegates were denied the right to vote, and this reinforced her ongoing concern for women's rights.

In a talk she gave to the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society in 1860, Lucretia reflected on her role and said the following:

I have no idea, because I am a non-resistant, of submitting tamely to injustice inflicted either on me or on the slave. I will oppose it with all the moral powers with which I am endowed. I am no advocate of passivity. Quakerism, as I understand it, does not mean quietism. The early Friends were agitators, disturbers of the peace, and were more obnoxious in their day to charges, which are now freely made, than we are.

Lucretia Mott was instrumental in the development of a women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, USA in 1848. The resulting *Declaration of Sentiments* was written primarily by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and included a deliberate parallel to the Declaration of Independence by saying: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal.'

At the end of the Civil War, Lucretia Mott became first president of the American Equal Rights Convention, and strove to reconcile the two factions that split over the priorities between woman suffrage and black male suffrage. She continued her activist role in search of peace and equality until her death in 1880.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge material published by John Johnson Lewis, Margaret Hope Bacon and Chris Faatz in preparing this talk.

Additional References:

Extracts from *Quaker Faith & Practice* (UK) – 23.39 and 23.41 (oppression).

Pendle Hill pamphlet 234 (Margaret Hope Bacon).

## Valerie Nichols

One of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most inspiring Quakers was Valerie Nichols, who for many years provided leadership as director of Quaker Service Australia. Born in Hobart in 1920, Valerie Pitfield was educated at The Friends School, whose motto 'no one is born for self alone' became part of her philosophy of life. She did very well academically and artistically, and also on the sporting field. Her literary skills were evident in poems, stories, and plays. Val attended the Memorial Congregational Church with her family, and became a keen girl guide in the church's company.

Val attended university, had time in the air force and as a nurse, then went to Parkin Theological College in Adelaide, planning for service in the Congregational Church. She was active in the Student Christian Movement and there met Ian Nichols, a young law student. They married in 1948 and came to Hobart where Ian continued his legal studies. Ian was blind, so Val assisted him by translating much of his study material into braille. They had five children, and enjoyed a full and energetic family life.

In 1949 Val and Ian joined the Friends Meeting and became actively involved. Val was noted for her deep vocal ministry in worship and for her creative leading of children's meetings. She pursued concerns for peace and social betterment, and became secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She wrote excellent submissions on such topics as education for peace, and the value of Aboriginal schools.

Val became very committed to the work of Quaker Service Council of Australia, the overseas aid arm of the Society of Friends. QSCA had emerged in 1959 after earlier efforts by Australian Friends to assist those suffering from the effects of World Wars and the Nazi occupation of Germany. Under Val's influence as administrator the scope of QSCA broadened from a fund-raising body to one administering projects internationally, especially in Southern Africa and South East Asia. She visited projects and carried on an extensive correspondence throughout the world in letters that were both practical and informative. Of particular note was her concern for the suffering people of Cambodia, and she expressed this as follows:

'I could cry for these people. But tears will not come. So many things destroyed, so many people, so many pillars of dead houses standing like naked, begging, agonised fingers clutching at empty air.' And further – 'It was a so blessed relief, a merciful return to sanity, to find a group of children at the gate, just a knot of giggling, peeping, curious kids ready to burst out laughing at a foreigner, given the slightest chance. God's good gift of young green grass springing in a desert place'.

Her deep compassion led to a significant range of QSCA work in that country, including a mobile sawmill, prostheses for amputees, and an English language training program. Her approach was to work with rather than for people. When the American Friends Service Committee found it difficult to send supplies to Cambodia because of limitations imposed by the American Government, QSCA was able to fill the gap.

After some years, the Australian Government aid agency offered financial support for QSCA projects, and this enabled the administration costs to be covered more easily rather than be dependent on the voluntary efforts of Val Nichols and others.

Sadly, Val was stricken by a debilitating illness which robbed her of every form of communication except the most basic. She struggled to continue communicating as best she could, and with the help of others she published a book of poems under the title *A Kind of Therapy*. She said during this time:

Life is become a canyon. The harsh rocky walls of my disablement press ever closer on me. There is less sky; and the opening so very far ahead.

Yet her faith shone through:

But I must summon courage, patience. I can enjoy a joke; I can direct my mind to tackle problems, wrestle with fears, and face my challenges, or browse at will among memories and pleasant thoughts, to work the present transient moment into perspective. I can get outside my canyon, and think of others, though I can give them little more than passed-on

love. I can delight in music; I am not as isolated as the very deaf. Count your blessings, fool.

She appreciated the love and caring from staff at a rest home where she stayed in her final years. She died in 1990 at the age of 70. She was an inspiration to those who visited her, as her serenity shone forth. Her life was an embodiment of faith, hope and love.

References: *Friends in Deed* by Heather Saville, *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography* and *this we can say* (Australia YM), as well as the book by William Oats *I Could Cry for These People*.

## William Oats

If we are looking for a Quaker who contributed in a wide range of concerns, we need look no further than Bill Oats. He was someone who had a global perspective, and showed great integrity in his personal and professional life. This was demonstrated at a gathering of over 700 at the thanksgiving meeting held after his death.

Bill Oats was born in Kapunda, South Australia, in 1912, and educated in Kapunda and Adelaide, completing a Bachelor of Arts degree with first class honours at the University of Adelaide in 1934. He taught at Adelaide High School and then moved to the International School in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1938 to 1940. Being in Europe at that time, he was confronted by the growing threat of war. He had become involved with the Quakers by then and this encouraged in him a strongly pacifist response. (Quote *this we can say* 3.91). He helped set up an international school in southern France for British children evacuated from Geneva, and then escorted 477 children on a ten-week ship voyage to Australia in 1940. This task showed his love of children and his creative skills as a teacher, as he helped keep them occupied and positive during the trip.

When he returned to Australia however he was faced with a requirement to register for military service. He wrote to the authorities explaining what he had been involved in during his time overseas and expressing his wish to be of service to his country without taking up arms. The authorities accepted this and ordered him to undertake service in the area of education. In later years he reflected on the many dilemmas facing people throughout life and on the need to make choices based not only upon principles but also upon as much information as possible about options.

Focusing on his teaching career, Bill Oats taught in Victoria and then became headmaster of King's College, Adelaide in 1942. His deputy at that school later remarked that Bill showed great vision as an educator, and an understanding of the relationship between freedom and responsibility. He also displayed a strong belief in co-operation not competition, and a great sense of humour. He continued his own academic education by obtaining a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Melbourne in 1948, and was awarded the Jacobs Prize for Education for his thesis on the International School in Geneva.

Bill married Marjorie in 1941 and they were together for 57 years. He described this as the 'deepest experience of my life ... and the most rewarding'. They had three children, one of whom (Stephanie) became a co-principal of The Friends School with her husband Lyndsay Farrall in the 1990s. (And, of course, we have his grandson Jeremy Farrall amongst us in Canberra Meeting).

In 1945 Bill Oats began what became a very long term as headmaster of The Friends School in Hobart. He quickly became a positive influence on the School community, staff, students and parents alike, especially through his emphasis on the principles of self-worth and service. As one scholar observed later, 'He encouraged the best in you without expecting you to be the best'. During his term as headmaster he oversaw the renewal of many buildings and the significant increase in enrolments to over 1000 students. Even after he retired in 1973, he continued to give active support to the School. In 1970 he was awarded the OBE for his services to education.

Outside the School, Bill Oats was Australian President of the New Education fellowship, a frequent broadcaster on educational, social and religious topics, a teacher at the University, a member of the Parole Board of Tasmania, a lifetime member of Rotary, a Fellow and also President of the Australian College of Education, member of a number of Commonwealth enquiries—into independent schools, teaching of Asian languages, and school libraries. Not content to rest on his

laurels, he also completed a Masters degree in education in 1978 and a Doctoral degree in history in 1983, both at the University of Tasmania.

In the Quaker world, Bill Oats served for some time at the Quaker United Nations office in New York, chaired Quaker Service Australia, was Presiding Clerk of Australia Yearly Meeting, as well as serving the Hobart Friends Meeting in various roles including Clerk and Elder. He spent time studying at the Quaker colleges of Woodbrooke in England and Pendle Hill in USA.

As a writer, Bill Oats published a remarkable range of books, especially focusing on Quakerism in Australia. He wrote a history of The Friends' School, a book about the beginnings of Quakerism in Australia, books about his teaching experiences, stories about the work of Quaker service, and a book about international challenges to peacemaking. Along with his wife Marjorie, he created the *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography* to ensure the appropriate recording of historical records of the Society of Friends. This Dictionary has been placed in the National Library in Canberra, as well as the Friends House Library in London.

Music played a central role in Bill's life, and he was especially valued for his skill in leading choral groups in the School and beyond.

This is David Purnell. I have used material from the *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*, Bill Oats' book *Choose Your Dilemma*, and newspaper cuttings in the preparation of this talk.

Quotes from *this we can say* – 1.65 on Quakerism, 1 76 on Jesus,

## William Penn

William Penn, who became the first hero of American liberty, was born in 1644 in London. His father was a naval admiral who had a good personal relationships with the Stuart kings and even served under Oliver Cromwell for a time. William Penn's mother did most of the child-rearing. From an early age he was interested in religion, and heard a talk by a Quaker Thomas Loe which excited his interest. He was impressed by the simplicity and directness of the Quaker approach, and their rejection of meaningless ceremony and creeds. When he went to Oxford University, William studied classics but became something of a rebel by defying Anglican traditions (including attendance at chapel) and siding with humanist scholars. He was expelled. His parents sent him to France where he studied with humanist Moise Amyraut who supported religious toleration.

Back in England in 1664, William studied law and learned more about civil liberties. He then served with his father as a personal assistant and courier, and thus became known to King Charles II and the Duke of York. He resumed his contact with Quakers and was arrested along with others because Quaker meetings were illegal. He insisted on being treated like the others, even though the authorities wanted to release him as an aristocrat. His legal skills came in handy as he prepared a defence. His father disowned him and he lived among Quakers. He began writing pamphlets to help the cause. He married Gulielma Springett, a Quaker, in 1672. They had seven children, four of whom died in infancy.

He was imprisoned in the Tower of London for attacking the Catholic/Anglican doctrine of the trinity, and when asked to recant declared that he owed his conscience to no mortal man. He wrote extensively while imprisoned, including his most well known work *No Cross No Crown*, a plea for religious toleration. After his release, he used his skills to help Quakers (including himself) who were arrested under the Conventicle Act for expressing non-conformist views, and the jury acquitted all defendants. The Lord Mayor locked up the jury and this led to a famous legal precedent whereby the Chief Justice and his associates ruled that juries could not be coerced or punished for their verdicts.

Convinced that religious toleration could not be achieved in England, William Penn went to the King and asked for a charter enabling him to establish an American colony. The King agreed (possibly because he owed a debt to Penn's father) and named the area Pennsylvania. William sailed to America in 1682 and founded Philadelphia with other Friends. He developed a legal basis for a free society in which the rights of individuals would be respected. He became governor and worked with a council of 72 which proposed legislation, and a General Assembly of 500 which

approved or rejected it. Members were elected for three-year terms. The 'Holy Experiment' as Penn called it, ensured secure private property, free enterprise, free press, trial by jury, and religious toleration. The death penalty was reserved for murder and reason (whereas in England it applied to over 200 crimes). In contrast, the Puritan colonies despised liberty and made political dissent a crime. Quakers were at risk of assault or death if they ventured to New England.

Perhaps Penn is most well known for his treaty with the Indians of Pennsylvania. He learned Indian dialects and acquired land through peaceful exchange. His famous Great Treaty with the Indians was hailed by Voltaire as 'the only treaty between those people (Indians and Christians) that was not ratified by oath, and that was never infringed'. The good intentions of the Treaty were, however, undermined to some extent by later colonists who sought to remove Indian control of remaining land.

Back in England William Penn defended many Quakers and others threatened with persecution for their beliefs. He persuaded King James II to proclaim the Acts of Indulgence which released more than a thousand Quakers. He fell out of favour when William of Orange became King, and his fortunes began to decline. He was cheated out of money and also out of control of Pennsylvania. By the time he died in 1718 Pennsylvania had ceased to be dominated by Quakers, but it remained a melting pot of immigrants from Europe who had been persecuted at home. Philadelphia became a major trading port and an intellectual centre.

Penn's legacy was enormous, as he showed the value of a free society and the capacity of people from different races and religions to live in harmony. Here is a sample of something he wrote in 1699:

Love silence, even in the mind... Much speaking, as much thinking, spends; and in many thoughts, as well as words, there is sin. True silence is the rest of the mind; and is to the spirit, what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.

Let me close with a favourite story of William Penn. It is said that he asked George Fox's advice on whether he should continue to wear his sword when among Quakers, as he had done in fashionable society. George Fox is reported as saying 'I advise thee to wear it as long as thou canst'. Not long after this, they met again and William had no sword. He told Fox 'I have taken thy advice; I wore it as long as I could'.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge material prepared by Jim Powell.

Additional references:

Comments on Testimonies (*The Quaker Reader* p. 109).

Extracts from *The Quakers* by James Walvin –p 31 (plain dress), 41 (education).

4.35 of *this we can say* – on death.

Penn and the Indians by Tuomi Forrest – article.

Article on Penn by Jim Powell, section on Pennsylvania.

## **Gerald Priestland**

One of the most prominent public figures in British broadcasting was Gerald Priestland, who for many years was involved in the BBC. He was born in 1927 and educated at Charterhouse and New College, Oxford. In his early life he was an Anglican, and then was confirmed in the Presbyterian Church. After a period of atheism, he later joined Quakers. He married Sylvia, a printmaker and photographer, and they had four children.

He began working for the BBC with a six-month spell writing obituary pieces for broadcast news. In 1954 he became the youngest person (at 26) to work as a BBC foreign correspondent, having been sent to New Delhi. Between 1958 and 1961 he was based in Washington DC where he covered the election of John F Kennedy as President. After that he went to the Middle East for four years. He later recalled that when he arrived in Baghdad the authorities tried to confiscate his typewriter in case he might use it to circulate subversive propaganda. He pointed out it did not type Arabic, and so they admitted it on condition that it be granted its own visa, which they inscribed in

the space labelled 'accompanied by his wife'. For months afterwards, immigration officers were demanding to see 'Mrs Olivetti Priestland'.

After the Middle East, Gerald then became a TV newsreader back in London. The opening night of the BBC 2 channel in April 1964 became memorable as it involved Gerald anchoring the evening's transmission from the newsroom following an extensive power failure across London. During the late 1960s he was back in the USA as chief American correspondent, covering such dramas as the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the black ghetto riots and the student protests against the Vietnam War. After his return to England he suffered a nervous breakdown. During his recovery he became a devoted Quaker.

This led him in the direction of religious broadcasting in the BBC's religious affairs area from 1977 to 1982. He reported on the Papal elections in 1978 and introduced a Saturday program on Radio 4 called 'Yours Faithfully'. He also developed a 13-part guide to the Christian faith called 'Priestland's Progress'. He recorded a series of talks – called 'The Pilgrim Pope' – about Pope Paul II in 1982 to celebrate the Pope's visit to Britain. He retired from the BBC in 1982. In 1986 he published an autobiography called *Something Understood*. This title became the name of a program heard in later years on the BBC World Service – interviews with people on religious themes. He once said of his profession: 'Journalists belong in the gutter because that is where the ruling classes throw their guilty secrets'.

Gerald Priestland wrote a variety of other publications on topics as varied as – the future of violence, dilemmas of journalism, an introduction to Quakers, the case against God, and the changing face of America. He was a critical thinker about religious belief. For example, in one of his writings he drew attention to the Gospel of John where Jesus claimed to be the only way to God. He admitted this apparently arrogant proclamation had always been a stumbling block for his own progress, as he was aware of the variety of religious traditions around the world and could not believe God would be so narrow-minded.

Within the Quaker movement, Gerald Priestland delivered two major lectures. In Britain he gave the Swarthmore Lecture in 1982 called *Reasonable Uncertainty: A Quaker Approach to Doctrine*. He said Quakers are chary of doctrine, feeling that it seeks to limit our understanding of God and to shut people out rather than bring them in. Drawing upon his BBC experience talking with more than a hundred thoughtful church people, he found doctrine to be far more flexible and useful than many of us suppose. In his own words 'It is not a set of unreasonable certainties, but of reasonable uncertainties. It is a way of packaging and passing on information. It is a set of tools to work with, not a row of idols to worship'. Referring to Quakers he said they may be an experimental sect but they build upon the foundations laid over many centuries by the Church.

In Australia he gave the Backhouse Lecture in 1985 called *For All the Saints*. This latter lecture provided a good insight into his thinking. He spoke of the Society of Friends as owing its persistence to its saints, who reflect love, courage and intimacy with God. He believed that saints, by showing our common humanity at its best, encouraged others to feel like doing good. He said that George Fox, founder of Quakerism, exhibited many of the qualities of a saint – simplicity, openness, courage, and peacefulness.

Gerald Priestland died in 1991 at the age of 64.

In June 2010, Colin Hall, a teacher of media studies and a Quaker, wrote to *The Friend* (the weekly Quaker journal in Britain) on the theme of journalists being present at Yearly Meeting. He expressed concern at the generally negative view of journalists, and affirmed their role in investigative reporting. He referred to the life and work of Gerald Priestland 'whose path towards Quakerism seems inextricably mixed with his work as a journalist, whose insights and skills as a communicator illuminated Quakerism so vividly'. Colin Hall said further: 'Journalists, as well as Quakers, may be counted as seekers and 'Friends of Truth', and it is right too that we should welcome them into our Meeting to share in the search'.

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## Margaret Roberts

Margaret Roberts was born in England, the only child of Sarah and Joseph Strongman. She was educated in Kensington, London, graduating from Kensington High School in 1926, then proceeding to a business college training. While employed at the national Bank of Australasia in London she studied for the matriculation examination of London University, and she later obtained a Diploma in Biology. Margaret had been influenced to attend Westminster Friends Meeting and the Adult School Movement by her friend Lexie Clarke who was also employed at the Bank. They shared a wish for travel to Australia, and arranged a transfer with the Bank in 1937 – the first time women had been given such an opportunity.

When Margaret and Lexie arrived in Melbourne they were welcomed into the Friends Meeting, and there they met two brothers – Ernest and Galer Roberts. Lexie soon married Galer and later (1942) Margaret married Ernest. Margaret had become a member of the Society of Friends in 1938. She was immediately put on a committee to investigate what could be done to help the European refugees who were coming to Australia to escape oppression. She also assisted with the Elizabeth Fry Retreat, a home for women ex-prisoners incapable of fending for themselves.

Margaret had a great interest in the natural environment, and joined a walking club. She was a member of the Melbourne Women's Bushwalking Club and from 1937 to 1944 kept a diary of their trips into the bush. This diary is now held in the State Library of Victoria. She was also skilled in craftwork. Margaret and Ernest made their home a place of welcome for Friends from all over Australia and visitors from overseas. Then in 1946 they and their small daughter Faye travelled to England and Margaret spent two and a half years working at Friends House and getting a wider sense of the range of Quakerism.

On returning to Australia, Margaret and Ernest felt led to prepare the way for the Australian Friends movement to become independent of London Yearly Meeting. This eventually came about in 1964, and Margaret was appointed Presiding Clerk in 1976. Sadly, Ernest did not live to see this, as he died in 1954. Margaret continued to serve Melbourne Friends in many ways, and her work for Quaker service included making links with people in Asia and the Pacific. When her daughter Faye married in the late 1960s and moved to Perth WA, Margaret decided to transfer there also. She became an active member of Perth Meeting. She was especially remembered for her concern to help young children feel part of the Meeting, and for her ongoing care for individuals not easily able to get to Meeting.

Margaret Roberts travelled across Australia on many occasions by car, visiting among Quakers, with a strong leading to keep the contacts alive in outback areas especially. (Quote *this we can say* 2.65) She attended world conferences in USA and Canada and allowed time for visiting Friends there. She valued ecumenical links and represented Friends on the Australian Council of Churches and Australian Church Women. In 1978 following the annual meeting of Australian Quakers, held in Perth, she completed a 10,000-mile journey by coach across the country, visiting Friends and attending an ecumenical conference. She said it was 'a very rewarding time, so many friendships renewed, many new friendships made, and I returned home with a sense of mission accomplished'. She died suddenly soon afterwards (October 1978).

One the occasion of her return from attending a world gathering of Quakers in 1976, Margaret Roberts said:

In theory I had said that we all have greater potential than we realise. Through experience I now know this to be true, for I had done things I thought I was incapable of doing. You too are capable of something that is within and without and a part of all creation. We sometimes speak of the Oneness of life. I coined a new word for myself – the Allness of life, and we are all part of that Allness.

Many tributes were paid to Margaret Roberts. Here is one:

She was completely faithful and honest; perhaps the words competent and diligent should be added. Faithfulness seemed to be her given quality and it stood strongly in her spiritual faith and understanding ... she lived by her steady inner light.

The staff of the Friends World Committee for Consultation spoke of 'her willingness to assume responsibilities and to take part in our activities. She gave her time in such a calm, gentle and careful way'.

This is David Purnell. I have used material from the *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*, and from the website of the State Library of Victoria, for this presentation.

## Caroline Stephen

The Society of Friends has had a long tradition of publishing written reflections on theological and practical matters. An outstanding example of a British Quaker writer was Caroline Emelia Stephen, who lived from 1834 to 1909. Her father, Sir James Stephen, was Regius Professor of History at Cambridge University, and her brother Sir Leslie Stephen was a brilliant writer of his time. Her first book, *The Service of the Poor* (1871) was a study of religious sisterhoods, institutions that held great appeal to her despite her commitment to the role of the family. When she joined the Society of Friends she did, nevertheless, adopt the plain grey dress style and spent much time on spiritual pursuits. In 1908 she wrote about the single life as follows:

... if it be our lot to stand apart from those close natural ties by which life is for most people shaped and filled, let us not be in haste to fill the gap; let us not carelessly or rashly throw away the opportunity of entering into that deeper and more continual acquaintance with the unseen and eternal things which is the natural and great compensation for the loss of easier joys ... (we must) grasp the master key of life so as to be able to turn everything to good and fruitful account.

Caroline had a limited education, yet was able to write very effectively. In a sense she was free from literary conventions and created her own style of writing. In addition she found great freedom in the silence of Quaker meeting for worship, and valued greatly the ministry of women in those meetings. She had a strong conviction that she should follow her own moral leadings, and that women had a particular perspective to bring to a patriarchal environment. Her most famous book *Quaker Strongholds* was published in 1890 and is still seen as an excellent expression of the Quaker faith. In the book Caroline explained her approach this way:

The one corner-stone of belief upon which the Society of Friends is built is the conviction that God does indeed communicate with each one of the spirit he has made, in a direct and living in-breathing of some measure of the breath of his own life.

And further:

The Quaker ideal, as I understand it, requires a continual weighing of one thing against another – a continual preference of the lasting and deep over the transient and superficial ... To my own mind this view seems to require ... the liberal use of whatever is truly helpful to our best life ...

Of the worship experience she wrote:

It is a deep quietness of heart and mind, a laying aside of the preoccupation with passing things ... a resolute fixing of the heart upon that which is unchangeable and eternal.

On a later occasion she added:

In the united stillness of a truly gathered meeting there is a power known only by experience, and mysterious even when most familiar.

Caroline was the sister of Leslie Stephen, who was the father of Virginia Woolf, and Caroline greatly encouraged her niece in writing. There seems to be clear evidence that the two had close contact, and that Virginia Woolf learned much from Caroline Stephen, not least from the fact that Caroline had suffered ill health from the stress of playing the role of dutiful daughter when her own mother was sick and then after she died. In addition, Leslie himself tended to belittle Caroline's

writing and see her as a person blighted by a lost love affair in her youth (even though there was no evidence of any such person or event).

After Virginia's father Leslie (Caroline's brother) died, Virginia had an episode of mental disturbance and spent some time staying with Caroline and attending the Cambridge Quaker Meeting in England. She was apparently reassured by Caroline's awareness of inner voices as a source of inspiration for writing. Caroline supported Virginia in submitting her writing to *The Guardian*, and this led to her first published article in 1904. In Caroline, Virginia found the model of a woman taking control of her life and writing her own books. Caroline left a significant sum of money to Virginia in her will, and this helped Virginia to live a more independent life.

Caroline Stephen is credited with having influenced many young Quakers who visited Cambridge for study. She also was in contact with Young Friends in the USA through her writings. Virginia Woolf wrote after Caroline died that 'the last years of her life among her flowers and with young people round her seemed to end fittingly a life which had about it the harmony of a large design'.

References: Alison Lewis 'A Quaker Influence on Modern English Literature' and *Quaker Spirituality* by Rick Moody.

Additional references: Quotes from 'Quaker Strongholds' in *Quaker Spirituality*, p. 121. Quote from 'The Vision of Faith' in *The Quaker Reader*, p. 450. Quote on bereavement from 22.93 of *Quaker Faith & Practice*. Quote from Smith College extract and photo.

## Marjorie Sykes

It is not uncommon for Quakers to feel called to work and live in a different environment from their own. One such Friend was Marjorie Sykes, an English Friend who was attracted by the cause of new education espoused by Mahatma Gandhi for India. Born in Yorkshire in 1905, Marjorie was the daughter of a village schoolmaster. When she was studying at Newnham College, Cambridge in 1923 she heard of Gandhi from the many Indian students she met. Marjorie progressed to the Cambridge teaching diploma, and then opted for overseas service, accepting a position at Bentinck School for Girls in Madras. She arrived there in 1928.

Soon after she arrived, Marjorie became part of the group called International Fellowship that was inspired by Gandhi. At a special conference arranged by the Fellowship, Marjorie heard Rajaji speak of Gandhi's constructive program. This led her to visit the Tiruchengodu ashram and learn spinning. She also learned local languages – Tamil, Hindi and Bengali. By now she was principal of the girls' school, and this enabled her to take steps towards making it a real community using Gandhian principles. She challenged the competitive culture by abolishing prizes for the best students. Above all she adopted the approach that education through active work was the basis of a new society.

In 1938 Marjorie had the great experience of meeting both Gandhi and Tagore and seeing first-hand their work in local communities. In 1939 she worked with Tagore at Santiniketan, and became acquainted with the Englishman C.F. Andrews who had supported Gandhi since his days in South Africa. She taught English at the Women's Christian College in Madras and lived in the slum area, starting a nursery school for children of working mothers. Gandhi himself invited Marjorie to become head of his new education team at Sevagram, but by the time she got there he had been assassinated.

Donald and Erica Groom, British Quakers who came to India in the 1940s with a similar commitment to support non-violent principles, spent some time with Marjorie, who was translating some of Tagore's plays. They recognised her strong commitment to India's development and her focus on the common ground between faiths. From her they learned the relevance of the Quaker approach of acceptance in the Indian environment.

Marjorie joined with Horace Alexander (another British Quaker) and Donald Groom to help form an interfaith committee in which people of different faiths could meet together to practice the truth of God in the world. As a result, she helped organise a meeting of World Pacifists. The 100 delegates included members of parliament, intellectuals and peace campaigners from many countries. Indian

Prime Minister Nehru visited the meeting. It was seen as a fitting tribute to Gandhi and his principles.

In 1957 Marjorie Sykes wrote as follows:

We are truly loyal to Jesus when we judge the religious systems of the world by the standard which he himself used....Every tree is to be known by its fruits: not by its dead wood or thorns or parasites, but by the fruit of its own life and nature. We all know the fruits of the Spirit and recognise the beauty of holiness in our own ancestral tree.. The flowers of unselfish living may be found growing in other people's gardens and rich fruits of the Spirit may be tasted from other people's trees. They spring from the same Holy Spirit of Truth, the same seed of God, whose power moves through Christ (*Quaker Faith & Practice*, 27.11)

In the 1960s Marjorie Sykes became part of a peace mission that spent several years in Nagaland (north-east India) helping implementing a cease-fire between Naga rebels and the Indian Government. Through personal contacts with people on both sides, she was able to help create a peaceful atmosphere.

In her later years, Marjorie worked among Quakers in India, helping establish the Rasulia rural development centre in Madhya Pradesh. She also conducted training groups in non-violence. She published a number of books, including *An Indian Tapestry, Moved by Love* (a memoir of Vinoba Bhave), and *Quakers in India*. Finally she moved back to England and lived in a Quaker retirement home in Buckinghamshire for her last few years. She died in 1995 at the age of 90.

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## **Hendrik van der Merwe**

One of the most significant South African Quakers was Hendrik van der Merwe.

He was born in 1929 in rural South Africa and grew up in a conservative Calvinistic environment. After finishing school he became a farmer, and then from the age of 19 to 21 he was superintendent of African schools in the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

His strong Afrikaaner heritage gave him a prejudiced view of other groups, and he initially welcomed the election victory of the nationalists in 1948 as a way to control the English and keep the blacks in their place. His approach gradually changed as he came to see all people as equally human.

He studied sociology at the University of Stellenbosch and obtained a Masters Degree in 1957. He then went to America and was awarded a PhD in Sociology in 1963 from the University of California in Los Angeles. He returned to South Africa to lecture in sociology at the Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

In 1968 Hendrik became founder of the Centre for Intergroup Studies in Cape Town, and he remained head of that centre until 1992. The aim of the centre was to carry out research and education in the broad field of race and language group relations. The primary areas of focus were English/Afrikaaner relations and white/coloured relations. In 1976 the Centre launched its Constructive Program for Sound Intergroup Relations as an attempt to make a practical contribution towards understanding and improving relations among members of different population groups. It began by analysing the impact of race discrimination on all aspects of South African life.

From his base as head of the Centre, Hendrik van der Merwe played a pivotal role in demonstrating the potential for better race relations, through training programs in handling community conflicts, and through advocating integrated models of association. For example, in

1976 he persuaded the South African Sociological Society to become integrated. He organised regional, national and international workshops where he brought together political opponents who otherwise did not meet. He arranged the first meetings between government supporters and the African National Congress (ANC) in 1984. He developed strong links with the Mandela family and visited Nelson Mandela in prison. He arranged the first meetings between the ANC and the Afrikaaner Freedom Movement in 1992.

Hendrik maintained a balance between academic work and writing, and active peacemaking. He published 'Peacemaking in South Africa' (2000), in the foreword of which Nelson Mandela said: 'These memoirs tell the story of the gradual development of a Calvinist dissident to an anti-apartheid activist and a Quaker peacemaker whose religious commitment and academic insights enabled him to reach out to all sides of the conflict in South Africa'. He also published on issues such as revenge and forgiveness, ways of communicating between adversaries in South Africa, and race and ethnicity.

By the end of the 1980s the Centre for Intergroup Studies was doing more work in training people in conflict resolution skills and facilitation. An excellent example of its influence was its mediating between warring taxi associations in Cape Town. It was also publishing regular newsletters to share knowledge and insights on the changes taking place in the country. In 1992 Hendrik moved to a role as consultant to the Centre, which changed its name to Centre for Conflict Resolution in 1994. Hendrik took a number of visiting academic positions in Britain, Europe and North America. In 1999 he received the Common Ground Award for an extraordinary lifetime as Peacemaker.

Hendrik did not become a Quaker until his forties. His local group was the Cape Western Monthly Meeting. He was Clerk of South Africa General Meeting for six years, and a Friend in residence with his first wife Marietjie at Woodbrooke Quaker College in Birmingham, England. Marietjie died in 1992 and he later married Elsbeth Woody, an accomplished sculptor, and they spent time at the Pendle Hill Quaker Centre near Philadelphia in USA. They then retired to a farm in the far south of South Africa.

In January 2001 Hendrik van der Merwe delivered the James Backhouse Lecture to Australian Quakers at their annual gathering. The Lecture was called *Reconciling Opposites: Reflections on Peacemaking in South Africa*. In the Lecture he outlined the history of South African Quakers, a small but very active group. He drew attention to the fact that James Backhouse, the English Quaker who founded Quakerism in Australia, had visited South Africa between 1838 and 1840 and helped establish a school for the poor in Cape Town. Further visits by British Quakers helped focus the emerging South African Quaker group on playing a reconciling role in the community. Hendrik pointed out that during the apartheid era Quakers took firm stands against various manifestations of race discrimination, economic inequality and political injustice. It was this that attracted Hendrik to join Quakers, and reinforced his own approach towards achieving change through a mediating role as bridge-builder and peacemaker.

In summing up at the end of his Lecture, Hendrik said:

As an intellectual, I continue to remain critical of the establishment and I abhor and expose abuse of power. As a Quaker I continue to side with the weak, the poor and the minority. As a peacemaker, I continue to search for common ground between adversaries and apparently-irreconcilable forces.

Hendrik van der Merwe was in poor health when he visited Australia, and he died two months later at his farm in South Africa in March 2001.

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## Elizabeth Gray Vining

A remarkable author, Elizabeth Gray Vining, was born Elizabeth Gray in 1902 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. Her father John was Scottish, whereas her mother Anne came from a Quaker family that had come to America even before William Penn. From both sides of the family came a tradition of song and stories. She attended Germantown Friends School and Bryn Mawr College. She then obtained a degree in library science from Drexel Institute, and became a librarian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1929 she married Morgan Vining, but the marriage was abruptly ended when he was killed in a car accident in New York in 1933. Elizabeth was left severely injured in the same accident. Her recovery was slow. Forty years later she wrote of 'the long slow assimilation of grief'.

It was in the aftermath of this terrible experience that Elizabeth left her Episcopal background and joined Quakers. She wrote that 'my search for meaning had taken me into many lanes and some blind alleys. In the end it was the silence that drew me, that deep healing silence of the Quaker meeting at its best, when the search of each is intensified by the search of all'.

She became a writer, primarily of children's books, and was awarded the Newbery medal in 1943 for her book *Adam of the Road*. By the end of the war she had written eleven books. Here is a comment by a reader about *Adam of the Road*:

Adam of the Road is about an eleven year old boy in Medieval England. Adam wants to grow into the same profession as his father a minstrel. In the middle of the night another minstrel comes and steals Adam's beloved dog Nick and Adam and his father set out in search of the pet. Along the way they are separated and Adam's quest doubles to find both the dog and his father. The book is an interesting look into peasant life in olden times of England as most of the history people read of is about kings and nobles. I found it informative and exciting. I could use the book to bring understanding of how music and stories originally began as minstrels were storytellers through musical means.

During the Allied occupation of Japan after the war, Elizabeth Gray Vining was invited by Emperor Showa in 1946 to become a private tutor to Crown Prince Akihito, heir apparent to the Imperial House of Japan. As part of her teaching program, she arranged for closely-supervised occasions when four Western teenage boys in Tokyo would get together to help the prince practice English conversation. She also introduced the children of the Imperial Household to Western values and culture, and lectured at Gakushuin University. As a result of her work she was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasure for meritorious service. She returned to the USA in 1950.

Elizabeth wrote several books about her Japanese experience, the most famous being *Windows for the Crown Prince* which was a best-seller. The prince clearly was greatly impressed by her, and kept in touch in her later years. She once spoke of the prince as a sincere boy whose eyes expressed a lively sense of humour within. He had been transformed from an isolated person into a poised young man. She was the only foreign guest at his wedding ceremony as emperor in 1959. As a result of her influence, the emperor and his wife changed Japanese tradition by raising their own children themselves.

Back in the USA, Elizabeth spent most of her time in the Philadelphia area –attending Germantown Friends Meeting, participating in the American Friends Service Committee programs, and visiting the Pendle Hill Study Centre. Eventually she joined the Quaker retirement community at Kendal, west of Philadelphia. Her writings continued throughout this time. She wrote biographies of several prominent Quakers including Rufus Jones, John Greenleaf Whittier and William Penn. However she had a modest view of herself, as reflected in this comment:

That I have never been the writer that I wanted to be has not greatly diminished my satisfaction in the work of writing. Every book has fallen short of my vision for it, (but I) would rather write than do anything else.

She wrote over 60 works of fiction and non-fiction during her lifetime.

Elizabeth Gray Vining was a member of the committee that chose the writers to be included in the regular series of Pendle Hill pamphlets. She emphasised that the choice of authors reflected a desire that they present views that realise the eternal behind the temporal. In due course she

became responsible for all the publications from Pendle Hill. She was also a mentor for the development of the artistic side of Pendle Hill's program of courses.

Elizabeth Gray Vining died at the age of 97 in 1999.

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## Elizabeth Watson

Elizabeth Grill Watson (1914-2006) was known among Quakers as a teacher, writer, activist, and lecturer for many years. Elizabeth Grill was born in 1914 in Cedar Rapid, Iowa, USA, and grew up in Ohio. As a child she was inspired to the preaching ministry especially by her maternal grandfather, a Methodist minister in South Dakota. She began her career as a speaker when she was in her teens.

Elizabeth graduated from Miami University in Ohio in 1936. During her college years she joined a Speakers Bureau and preached in small churches which could not afford a minister. She was in due course offered a scholarship to study at the Chicago Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago Divinity School. She was drawn to urban ministry, and met George Watson. They married in 1937, using as part of their vows Walt Whitman's idea of becoming 'a union of equal comrades', and together they made the transition to Quakers when they joined the 57<sup>th</sup> Street Meeting of Friends in 1938.

During World War II they became deeply involved in activities of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), such as the relocation of Japanese-Americans. After the War, George taught at Roosevelt University in Chicago, and Elizabeth worked for AFSC and the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference. Elizabeth became known for her workshops on race relations and was an advocate for equality for homosexual people. She spoke of the importance of caring in any relationship.

During this time, they raised four children and four foster daughters. The death of their oldest daughter, Sara, in 1964 in a road accident led Elizabeth in 1978 to write *Guests of My Life*, about six writers whose writings supported her through the grieving process. She said in the foreword 'They helped me to see that my personal tragedy was part of the universal human experience, so that I could move through it and beyond it'. The writers were Emily Dickinson, Rainer Rilke, Katherine Mansfield, Rabindranath Tagore, Alan Paton, and Walt Whitman. In 1980, Elizabeth wrote that 'a family should be a learning community in which children not only learn skills and values from parents, but in which adults learn new ways of experiencing things and seeing things through young eyes'.

The stories in another of her books, *Wisdom's Daughters*, began taking shape in 1984 and were published in 1997 after a long process of Gospel reading, biblical research and imagining, and collaborative efforts with many friends and Friends. One of the stories, 'The Woman Who Anointed Jesus,' was published under the title *The Crone* by the Wider Quaker Fellowship in late 1990, after it was given as one of the Bible half-hour lectures at New England Yearly Meeting sessions in August of that year.

In *The Mother of the Sons of Zebedee*, published in 1997, Elizabeth Watson constructs a scenario in which the mother of James and John seeks special consideration for them from Jesus. Elizabeth says of this story:

I'm confident, however, that in the end she did understand what the community Jesus wanted to establish was all about and entered the new movement whole-heartedly.

Matthew includes her in the group of women present at the crucifixion. She did make the long trip to Jerusalem.

Elizabeth spent much time studying women in the Bible and became interested in liberation theology and the empowerment of minorities and women. She stressed that Quakers were not living simply enough and were not living the idea that God existed to benefit the powerless and the poor. In a talk given in 1990 she spoke of the spiritual roots of humans' ecologically destructive behaviour, and demonstrated that earthcare requires not only a new manner of living but a transformed consciousness about our place in Creation.

George and Elizabeth became active members of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), and expanded their awareness of Friends in many parts of the world. In 1972 George became head of Friends World College in Long Island, New York. Elizabeth was prominent as a liberal Quaker preacher and also worked as curator of the Walt Whitman birthplace in Huntington NY. In 1973 Elizabeth was a speaker at the Friends General Conference in Earlham College, Indiana. In 1980 George retired and they travelled extensively in USA and Canada, and were Fellows in Residence at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study centre near Philadelphia. In 1991 they moved to Minneapolis and became active in the Friends Meeting there.

Elizabeth Watson died in 2006 at the age of 92. She is remembered as a Quaker minister, feminist theologian, Bible scholar, and writer.

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## **Margaret Watts**

One of the most prominent Australia Quakers was Margaret Watts. Margaret was born in 1892 in Liverpool England, daughter of James Herbert Thorp, a medical practitioner, and Anne Sturge. Her family was steeped in the Quaker tradition, and her parents kept open house for many visitors. She had a happy childhood and attended a Quaker school, where she developed a particular interest in archaeology and astronomy. She was encouraged to think for herself, and whilst she developed a strong faith within the Quaker movement she explored the faith of others also. She went to peacemaking classes at Woodbrooke College, the Quaker centre in Birmingham. She became an ardent believer in social equality and socialism, although she did not condone violence.

In 1912 Margaret Thorp travelled to Australia with her parents. She became very involved in the peace movement, and was active in the anti-conscription campaigns during the first world war. It was a volatile time, with the community seriously split about conscription. At one public meeting in Queensland, she was knocked down, and thrown out. But she returned by another door and mounted the platform to voice her convictions. (Quote from Harry Throssell's commentary). Her continued dedication to the cause and her public advocacy led her into conflict with those clergy who supported the war. Someone asked her not to make YWCA girls disloyal to King and country. She replied that her goal was to make them supremely loyal to the Kingdom of God. She earned much respect from political opponents as well as supporters.

After the war she travelled to Europe to undertake post-war relief work with the Society of Friends. This included working with Quaker teams feeding the hungry children in Russia after the Revolution.

On her return to Australia, Margaret was appointed the first welfare superintendent of Anthony Hordern's department store in Sydney. She also helped form the City Girls Amateur Sports Association and was the first president. The idea arose when the female employees of six city businesses attempted to hold an Inter Firm Sports Meeting. The Association became a vehicle for women to participate in team games and improve their health and fitness. Up to 50 clubs were affiliated during the lifetime of the Association, which wound up eventually in the Depression.

In 1925 Margaret married Arthur Watts, who had worked in Russia for Save the Children Fund, but they had very different views of trends in Russia and the marriage ended after six years. In 1930 Margaret became welfare officer to the NSW Society for Crippled Children, and this position lasted until 1946. In 1947 Margaret Watts helped raise funds in Australia for the British Red Cross, and volunteered for service with the Quakers in the post-war reconstruction of Europe (especially Germany).

On her return she did a lecture tour promoting awareness of the United Nations and helped ensure Australia's first contribution to UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund. She became executive secretary of the Good Neighbour Council, working with migrant groups around Australia. This led in 1957 to her being awarded the MBE for her work in helping new settlers. In 1975 she was chosen as Senior Woman of the Year.

After her retirement, Margaret Watts spent much time and energy raising funds for the victims of war, notably Vietnamese war orphans, and child and adult amputees in that country. She offered hospitality to many at her home, especially Asian students. The meeting for worship remained central to her life, and she ministered vocally in a simple but most moving way. She knew her Bible well and also read modern religious books, but her emphasis was on the heart rather than theology. She died in 1978 at the age of 86.

Margaret Watts was an exemplary pacifist, someone who was clear about the underlying religious basis for her peace work. She was courageous and persistent in her commitment, but modest in her manner. On one occasion she wrote:

Who are the real national heroes? Surely they are the men and women who do the little things of life in a big way, putting their best energies and interests into their work, and whose friendship has no boundaries.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge material published in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, in the *Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biography*, on the website of *Australian Women*, and in an on-line review by Harry Throssell of the book *Peace Angel* by Hilary Summy

## John Woolman

It has been common among Quakers for John Woolman to be described as 'the quintessential Quaker', and there is a book of that title written by David Sox. Another writer, Harold Loukes, spoke of John Woolman as 'the purest and sweetest flowering of the Quaker spirit'. The reason for these expressions may be found in Woolman's gentle and determined approach to life.

Born into a Quaker family in New Jersey, USA, in 1720, John Woolman was fourth child in a family of thirteen. His father was a farmer, but John became a clerk and then a tailor. His writing skills made him popular in drawing up important documents for his employer and others. He found that his conscience troubled him when he was asked to write a bill of sale for a slave. Although he did write it on the basis that he thought the new owner would be kind, he later decided to confront a neighbour when drafting his will which included giving his negro slave to one of his children. By explaining his reservation about writing a document which enslaved a human being, John Woolman convinced his neighbour to omit that part of the will.

John Woolman was a faithful member of his local Quaker Meeting for all his life. He wrote a *Journal* of his experiences, and this included very little reference to his wife and children or to his ongoing business as a tailor. This reflected his focus on the spiritual tasks he felt called to do. But some of his writings indicate that he was deeply concerned about the spiritual nurture of children, and saw parents as having a significant responsibility to instruct them in matters of faith.

He was aware that some Quakers held slaves, and that the movement as a whole had no testimony against this. He set about persuading his fellow Quakers of the inconsistency of holding slaves with their understanding of the humanity of all people. He sought by example to encourage others to reflect on their own decisions. The following words give some idea of the way Woolman linked his faith with its practical expression:

Oppression in the extreme appears terrible; but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression; and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows

stronger and more extensive. To labour for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world.

John Woolman was accepted as a minister of his Friends Meeting, and travelled a lot among Friends and others. He spoke to slave-owners about the evils of slavery, but he focused on appealing to their conscience rather than blaming them. When receiving hospitality from them, he would leave them some money to be distributed among the slaves from whose services he had benefitted. Among Friends he worked effectively to raise awareness of the slavery issue, and was instrumental in the decision by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758 to establish a committee to visit those Friends who still held slaves.

In due course John Woolman decided to forego his business in order to give full attention to his spiritual callings. He became convinced of the necessity of living simply, and insisted on taking the least pretentious form of transport. He was even an early advocate for the importance of caring for the earth. He said 'to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age'. He also wore unbleached clothes to avoid using dyes produced by slave labour.

Concerned about American Indians, John Woolman made a dangerous journey among them in 1759 in the northern part of Pennsylvania. He recorded in his Journal:

Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the Spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth amongst them.

When he spoke a heart-felt prayer, the Indian chief Papunehang, put his hand on his own breast and said 'I love to feel where the words come from'.

John Woolman had a strong commitment to the Quaker peace testimony. He signed an epistle with 13 others during the French and Indian War presenting the case for refusing to pay taxes levied to support the war. He adopted a tolerant approach to other religious groups, saying that the basic spirit of God 'is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity'.

John Woolman went to England in 1772. He presented to London Yearly Meeting a travelling minute from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and spoke movingly about his concerns. The result was that the Meeting included a condemnation of slavery in its Epistle at the close of the gathering. Sadly, Woolman fell ill with smallpox during his time in England, and died in October 1772. His life represented much of the essence of Quakerism in the way he worked steadfastly and with great respect for others to express his beliefs in action.

This is David Purnell. I acknowledge the writings of Walter and Mildred Kahoe, Bill Samuels and David Sox in the preparation of this talk. I also used quotations from Britain Yearly Meeting's *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

Additional References:

*Quaker Faith & Practice* (UK) Para 2.57 on ministry and silence. Para 13.24 on travelling under concern.

*this we can say* para 5.53 shows impact of Woolman on Australian Friends.

*A Certain Kind of Perfection*, p. 125, on simplicity.