



# **The Northern Friends Peace Board 1938 - 1950**

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**Centenary Essays**

Historic pieces drawn from the NFPB archives

them their fellow Christians and citizens generally in the active promotion of peace in all its height and breadth.

That, as the review of the Committee opens out before it, <sup>should</sup> any Friend with concern offer to assist in this glorious cause, the Board be empowered to make such arrangements as see



## **People and Organisation**

Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) was founded in 1913 as an urgent response to the growing threat of war. The organisation worked so effectively and impressively for peace 'in all its height and breadth' before and during the First World War that in 1919 it was decided to continue with the good work. Throughout the inter-war years, NFPB continued to work for disarmament and reconciliation between nations, but also responded to new concerns such as the conflict in Ireland, race relations in America, support for the constructive aspects of the League of Nations and promoting ethical investment.

### **Who were the Board activists 1938-1950?**

In First World War, in contrast to the 1913 -1920 period, only a minority of the active members of the Board came from well-established Quaker families. The majority were Quakers by conviction. Among these, George Bairstow, Douglas Owen, Arthur Raistrick and Stanley Farrar had been COs in First World War and had joined Friends either during or soon after the war. Their own experiences as COs enabled them to support the new generation of COs when conscription was brought in again in 1939. George Bairstow served as a Quaker chaplain at Armley Gaol, Douglas Owen assisted young men at tribunals and Arthur Raistrick was suspended from his post as Lecturer in Applied Geology at Durham University, for refusing war service.

John Fletcher, who was employed as a speaker by NFPB, joined Quakers in Australia before the war and was imprisoned as a CO in both New Zealand and England. Charles Brunton served in the Friends Ambulance Unit and became a Quaker in 1930. Amy Lewis and Gladys Needham also joined Friends between the wars. One Friend who did come from a long-standing Quaker background was Gerald Bailey, Director of the British National Peace Council.

Like their forerunners in 1913-20, this generation of NFPB activists were able communicators, skilled at speaking and writing. Many had professional or academic backgrounds and there were noticeably fewer businessmen among their number than in the earlier period.

As in First World War, the key leader among Board members at a time of crisis was a woman. Helen Byles Ford was Chair of the Board from 1929-1936 and she took the role again from 1939-1941. She was a member of Meeting for Sufferings from 1928-1938 and of the Peace Committee from 1930-1938. In

1949 she revised *The Quaker Peace Testimony: an Anthology*, published jointly by Friends Peace Committee and NFPB and she also wrote an NFPB pamphlet titled *The Christian Pacifist Position*. She lived at Bentham in Yorkshire, where her husband (himself clerk of his Preparative Meeting for 46 years) ran the family firm of silk spinners.

Robert Long's experience and achievements as Secretary since 1913 were invaluable to the Board and he played the leading role in ensuring that NFPB responded surely, promptly and calmly to the outbreak of Second World War. The NFPB Minutes of the period contain less detail and much less discussion about the Board's activities than we find in the records from 1914-18. This would seem to be because in 1939-45 they could build on their earlier work and experiences, rather than strive to meet unprecedented challenges. For example, there is no mention of Quaker Chaplains in the Minutes (we know from other sources that George Bairstow was a Chaplain).

Robert Long began a well-deserved retirement on 31 October 1942, having given the Board several months notice. Thirty-one applications were received for the post of Secretary and four were short listed: Wilfred Goom, Douglas Owen, Louisa Roberts and Stanley Farrar. The latter three were interviewed and Stanley Farrar was appointed in July 1942, starting work on 1 November.

Born in 1891, Stanley was also a CO and after marrying Elizabeth Morris Innes he joined Friends in Birmingham in 1916, moving to Edinburgh in 1920. He worked as Science Master at George Watson College until 1922, then became head of Geography until 1942. He had been Scotland's NFPB representative since 1932 and Chair of the Executive since 1936. As Secretary he faced the frightening new challenges of weapons of mass destruction killing civilians on a vast scale and the dangerous tensions of the Cold War.

## Organisation

The Board was made up of representatives from the five Quarterly Meetings in the North of England, from Derbys, Lincs and Notts and from Scotland and North Wales. In addition there were three or four co-opted members. From the beginning NFPB had a full time paid Secretary, which was an innovation at that time. The office in Leeds held a variety of peace-related resources and had a room for private interviews. The secretary was assisted by a part-time typist.

During the war it was not viable for Board meetings to move around the North as they had done in peace time, but NFPB did gather in Leeds around three times a year. In addition, formal Executive meetings took place about nine times a year, almost always in Leeds, normally with four or five regular Friends attending. (In practice, a similar arrangement existed informally in First World War with a rump Board mainly made up of members local to Leeds.) The Executive dealt with the details of finance, publications and meetings and had regular oversight of the Secretary. Occasionally they also had to address major issues.

## **Upholding the Peace Testimony**

As in the 1914-18 war, the Board's priority in Second World War was to uphold the Peace Testimony and to communicate this message, especially to Friends but also to other Christians and the wider public. The 1939 Annual Report, completed three days after the outbreak of War, declared that 'the Board is determined to persist in the spread of the fundamental message of the Christian gospel, which we are convinced will make all things possible.'

The Secretary, Robert J Long, listed the Board's aims as:

Maintaining a peaceful way of life; preserving sweetness and preventing degeneration of thought; shortening the days of war; helping those who for conscience sake cannot undertake activities for war; maintaining civilisation through care for the suffering and the upkeep of essential services.'

As a practical example of their work, the executive endorsed the Relief Unit for Poland and the work of the German Emergency Committee. Robert Long declared that 'there must be a positive outgoing for peace – love at any cost'. (Executive meeting, 29 Sept 1939)

In June 1940, NFPB set out their priorities for the Practical Peace Work as:

supporting individual COs and pacifists who were losing faith; helping interned aliens; influencing young people; working for post-war reconciliation (for example by learning French and Italian); thinking out an economic system compatible with Christian ideals.

The 1941 annual report affirmed 'that our task is no less than a great evangelism, which is of vital importance to men and women everywhere'. In September 1942 NFPB visualised that 'a message of healing may irradiate from

innumerable points dispersed over our Quarterly Meetings.' (Leeds, 26 Sep 1942)

After the end of the war, Charles Brunton, in *Peace Testimonies in a Disillusioned World* called for 'those conscious of "a divine personality" to show this, believing men respond to the challenge of goodness.' (Leeds, 2 Feb 1946)

## **Communications and Literature**

Many NFPB members were able speakers and were kept busy spreading the peace message. In addition, in 1943 the Australian CO John P. Fletcher was employed by the Board, visiting 21 meetings. Posters, pamphlets and correspondence were issued on a large scale. By January 1940 the most widely-distributed posters were the Lights of the World series (designed by John Hunter) with 15,903 copies sent out. Other Board members also assisted in designing posters.

However, wartime shortages led to a reduction in output, as indeed they had in the previous conflict. Censorship became a concern much earlier than it had in the First World War. On 29 June 1940 the Board minuted that 'police officers have approached Friends who have displayed posters. Distributors have been warned by NFPB not to display old posters without consultation with the Office.'

## **Concerns about young people**

The Board always gave high priority to education at all levels. A recurrent topic was the malign effects of growing up in a war-time environment on the emotional and moral health of impressionable young people. In a discussion on work among children, introduced by Dorothy Smith, Friends discussed how to tackle the problem of encountering opposition from parents who might not uphold the Peace Testimony. 'We realise that pacifism springs from an outlook on life based on fundamental Christian principles (Sept 1940). The Executive was asked 'to consider how our Peace Testimonies can be brought more effectively before the young people of the Society' (May 1943).

In October 1941 NFPB sent a letter to Universities opposing the requirement for students to register for National Service and also complained about

Liverpool University's continued demand for military training at the end of the war.

The Board were deeply involved in opposing militarism, supporting the rights of conscientious objectors and promoting efforts for international peace and reconciliation. Their work on these concerns during the years 1938 – 1950 is outlined in three further articles.

*Sources:* NFPB minutes and Executive Minutes 1938 – 50

Dictionary of Quaker Biography Thanks to staff at West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds and Friends House Library for assistance during research.

