

Quakers and Social Reform in England
1780 – 1870

Ann Maree Jones, BA (Hons) Murdoch

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University

August 2010

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution

.....

Abstract

This thesis considers Quaker social reform activism in England from 1780 – 1870 and explores the underlying motivations of those involved. An industrialising British society had given rise to major economic and social changes, resulting in rising poverty and crime. This in turn led to an interest by the middle and upper classes, of which Quakers were members, in reforming the morals of society and ensuring the transmission of middle-class values to create a civil society. The extent to which Quakers were involved with this moral reformation is explored, along with examining how integral their religious doctrine was to their involvement. Quaker humanitarianism is also considered in order to show that Quaker reform activism was informed not only by their theology, but also by their overriding concern with the welfare of all human beings. A growing interest in the well-being of others began to emerge in the early nineteenth century and Quakers were at the forefront of this growing humanitarianism. Quakers also held a strong belief in the primacy of the individual, with everyone being considered of equal worth. This notion of equality informed Quaker actions and led to the incorporation of very early human rights principles into their activism. The areas of reform investigated in this thesis for Quaker motivations are education, capital punishment and prison reform, poor relief, the abolition of slavery, and the treatment of Indigenous peoples in British colonies.

The historiography of nineteenth-century social reform movements has mostly neglected the Quaker contribution in this area and this thesis adds Quakers back onto the historical stage as subjects in their own right. The primary sources accessed for this thesis include reports and minutes from Quaker committees and organisations, along with interdenominational organisations that had a high percentage of Quaker

membership. One Quaker journal in particular has also been utilised as another means of exploring Quaker thoughts and actions, as well as personal Quaker diaries and letters. These sources indicate that Quakers were integral and influential participants in reform activism, and not merely peripheral players as argued by some historians.

This thesis argues that Quakers were not a homogenous group, but a group with divergent beliefs and practices that played out in different ways. This thesis also argues that the notions of moral reform and humanitarianism/human rights in the nineteenth century were not rigid concepts, but were interchangeable depending on time, place, and context. Quakers took up the rhetoric of the middle-classes in relation to moral reform, but their actions also indicate that the human rights of others were often an overriding concern. This thesis positions Quakers as early human rights activists who fought for the rights of all individuals, underpinned by their religious understandings of the equality of all human beings.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has supported me, and provided encouragement throughout the process of writing my thesis. Sincere thanks are owed to the staff of the Friends' Library in London for their kindness, and their willingness to aid me in my research, both with sharing their knowledge and helping to find obscure sources. Special thanks especially to Julia Hudson who attended to all my long-distance queries promptly and informatively. The staff at the British Library in London were also very generous with their time and knowledge, and I am extremely grateful to both these institutions for their guidance.

I owe a very big debt of gratitude to my fellow students who have contributed to my growth as a researcher, and as a person. You have filled my years at Murdoch University with love, laughter and joy, and I thank you all for your friendship and support. Special thanks to Pat Humphries for her never-ending patience and encouragement. I would also like to thank Professor Mike Durey for his knowledge and advice, and especially his speedy reading of my thesis.

My very special thanks, however, go to my main supervisor and mentor, Dr Helen Brash. The guidance provided to me by Helen was always insightful and constructive, and her input into the finer points of researching and writing a thesis was outstanding. More importantly, the friendship we have developed over my years at Murdoch University will always be a most special part of this journey.

Finally, I would like to thank all my friends for their support during my years of study. In particular, special thanks go to Vicki Crutchett and Pam Edmondson for their unqualified support and friendship. Heartfelt thanks also go to all of my family,

especially my parents who took great pride in my achievements, and my brother Brett for being there with me every step of the way. And lastly, to my husband George, words cannot convey my love and appreciation for your support and encouragement. I could not have done this without you.

Abbreviations

APS	Aborigines' Protection Society
BIA	Bedford Institute
BFASS	British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society
BFBS	British and Foreign Bible Society
BFSS	British and Foreign School Society
FFDSA	Friends' First-day School Association
HC	House of Commons
LSF	Library of the Religious Society of Friends, London
LYM	London Yearly Meeting
MFSM	Meeting for Sufferings Minutes
PDS	Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and for the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

Contents

1. Introduction	<i>Page 1</i>
2. Literature Review	<i>41</i>
3. Quaker Beginnings	<i>75</i>
4. Education	<i>98</i>
5. Capital Punishment	<i>143</i>
6. Poor Relief	<i>185</i>
7. Abolition of Slavery	<i>223</i>
8. Indigenous Rights	<i>259</i>
9. Conclusion	<i>304</i>
<i>Appendix A</i>	<i>313</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>317</i>