

Quakers, Free Trade and Social Responsibility



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1 Introduction

A conundrum lies at the heart of reflecting upon the role of the Quakers in relation to ‘free trade,’ and their exercise of both business and social responsibility.¹

John Bright, a Quaker, and the then Member of Parliament for Durham,² pleaded in his maiden speech in the House of Commons, ‘for the adoption of the principle of perfect freedom of trade’ (Hansard, 7th August 1843). Bright, statesman and campaigner, the unquiet Quaker (Cash 2017), aligns himself four-square with neo-liberal free trade. Quakers in Britain—the umbrella of the British Yearly Meeting based at Friends House—in their contemporary work on economic justice and trade relationships argue that the ‘global economic system is posited on continued expansion and growth, and in its pursuit of growth it is often unjust, violent and destructive’ (Minute 23, 2011) and requires ‘a fundamental rethink of global trade rules,’ (<http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/economic-justice/trade>). A rather different perspective.

Bright was not alone. Not only so, but the complexity deepens. The first Quaker Member of Parliament, Joseph Pease, argued against the factory reformer, Lord Ashley,³ that ‘if the hours of labour were abridged, he must... inevitably close his manufactory’ (Hansard, 1st July, 1839). John Bright accused Ashley, in his promotion

¹This chapter primarily focusses on the Quaker role in the British campaign for free trade in the nineteenth century.

²Bright sat for Durham 1843–1847, Manchester 1847–1857, Birmingham 1857–1885, Birmingham Central 1885–1889.

³Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801–1885), Lord Ashley until 1851 when he succeeded as the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury. See Richard Turnbull, *Shaftesbury*, Oxford, Lion Hudson, 2010.

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of the 1844 Factories Bill, of ‘the most extraordinary misstatements and the grossest exaggerations,’ and dismissed Ashley’s evidence as absurd and unfair (Hansard, 15th March 1844). Bright admitted that he employed 69 boys and 84 girls between the ages of 13 and 16. In a factory owned by a fellow Quaker, Edmund Ashworth, there were 126 boys and 113 girls, aged between 13 and 16, and 98 children under 13 years of age. Parliament had, in respect of the manufacturers, Bright complained, ‘interfered with their natural progress, you have crippled them by your restrictions.’ The people, he argued, ‘ask for freedom for their industry, for the removal of the shackles on their trade; you deny it to them, and then forbid them to labour, as if working less would give them more food. . . Give them liberty to work, give them the market of the world for their produce’ (Hansard, 15th March 1844). Ashley and Bright literally tussled (verbally) in the Commons. At the final debate on the Ten Hours Bill, in 1847, Bright described the legislation as ‘one of the worst measures ever passed in the shape of an Act of the Legislature’ (Hansard, 10th February 1847).

So, the first Quaker Parliamentarians opposed factory legislation which protected children and young people and advocated free trade. Shaftesbury described Bright as his most malignant opponent and Elizabeth Isichei, in her study of Victorian Quakers noted that:

No Quaker played a prominent part in the agitation for the limitation of factory hours. Where they appear in its history at all, it is almost always as its inveterate opponents (Isichei 1970, p. 247).

Yet, both historically and in contemporary debate, Quakers and Quaker practices are quoted approvingly as examples of enlightened entrepreneurs, as early adopters of honourable business and commercial practices, as employers who set trends and examples and indeed as philanthropists and social reformers. James Walvin extols their trust and integrity—‘their produce was sound, their prices fair, their services honest, their word good and their agreements honourable’ (Walvin 1998, p. 210). Yet he also recognises the tensions which arose from their acquisition of wealth within a moral community and that the Quakers were not alone nor universally enlightened (Walvin 1998). Ian Bradley refers to the Quakers as ‘among the most enlightened of all Victorian entrepreneurs and shared a commitment to the welfare of their employees which has perhaps never been equalled’ (Bradley 2007, p. 125).

How then are we to reconcile this conundrum?

There are a number of options. The first is to argue that the picture drawn of the benevolent Victorian Quaker business magnate is in fact a myth, a later construct (Rowlinson and Hassard 1993). Although this calls attention to the danger of ‘house histories’ and placing more weight on the shoulders of Cadbury, Rowntree and others than they can reasonably bear, with the consequential danger of hagiography and lack of academic rigour, this approach also fails to give due weight to the Quakers disproportionate influence for good. The second, and more fruitful option, is to recognise the conundrum and complexity and seek, not to excuse the failings, but at least to understand them. In this line of argument, which this chapter will explore further, there were particular spiritual, cultural and political reasons which help explain both the adoption of the mantra of free trade and the opposition to some

aspects of social reform. In addition, Quaker beliefs were not static and some aspects can be explained by development over time. An element of the conundrum remains and, academically, it is right that it does so and is neither elevated nor submerged. The fact remains that many Quaker business families were leaders in philanthropic and social enterprise and were pioneers of much good business practice. However, they were not unique, faced many internal and external pressures, reflected many of the characteristics of the time and made some errors of judgement. They cannot, however, be ignored.

2 Quakers and Free Trade

In order to understand why Quakers embraced free trade we need to think about how a number of disparate elements came together in the Quaker person and character. A few salient facts set the scene. According to the 1851 religious census (accepting all of the caveats) the number of Quakers amounted to 17,000 or 0.1% of the population, half the number of Unitarians and smaller than the remains of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. This was approximately half the number in the mid-eighteenth century. So, the number of Quakers was both small and declining by the middle decades of the nineteenth century. As we will see professionals and merchants were disproportionately represented. Traditionally Quaker lifestyle was characterised by simplicity of disposition, consumption and dress, hence the description 'men in grey.' All of these factors faced challenge from both internal and external pressures in the nineteenth century. However, central to the explanation of our conundrum is the recognition that Quakers displayed not only peculiarities of life and practice, but also distinctive beliefs around religious liberty formed and shaped by their history and which was translated into beliefs around economic and political liberty in later centuries.

2.1 *Quakers and Religious Liberty*

A central characteristic of the Quakers from their early years was that of a belief in liberty. They were shaped in this by both their political context and their theological beliefs. This emphasis was finely honed during many years of persecution. They were in essence both 'free thinkers' and 'free spirits.'

The Quakers emerged from the ministry of George Fox (1624–1691). The Quakers were one particular aspect of Protestant dissent with a strong emphasis on freedom—from both the established church and the state (the difference between the two not being at all obvious outside of the period of the Commonwealth (1649–1660)). The Quakers began to effectively organise from around 1652. Their radical free thinking was a challenge as much to Cromwell as it was to the Stuart dynasty. The rather austere Calvinism of the Puritans often left the heart cold. This provided a ready opening for the Quakers with their quest for an essentially

experiential faith with God speaking neither through Kings nor Lord Protectors but directly to the heart of the believer.

The concept of the inner light was the force which equipped the Quaker with a freedom of belief, conscience and practice, with a power that could not be easily contained. The like-minded began to gather; the message received a ready-hearing. Freedom of thought, freedom also from clergy, sacraments and, at least in the beginning, buildings. The free reign of the Spirit was equipping the Quaker character. Difficult to handle for Cromwell, a fundamental challenge to the very fabric of society once the Stuarts had returned in the shape of Charles II (1660–1685)—‘radical religion was seen as a challenge to order and was not tolerated’ (Turnbull 2014, p. 14). The viciousness of the Clarendon Code, four Acts of Parliament enacted by Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, has been largely lost to history. The Corporation Act (1661) required all holders of public office to take Holy Communion according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England and to reject Cromwell’s Commonwealth. The Act of Uniformity (1662) imposed the Book of Common Prayer. The Conventicle Act (1664) prevented more than five people meeting for worship outside the parish church unless they belonged to the same household. The Five Mile Act (1665) forbade ministers who had left their livings—being unable in conscience to swear the oaths demanded by the Act of Uniformity—from coming within five miles of their previous livings. Although aimed at all forms of religious dissent the ‘Quakers, radical dissenters both spiritually and politically, were among the most persecuted’ (Turnbull 2014, p. 14).

Oppression and imprisonment seared the passion for religious liberty into the heart and character of the Quaker in a way that no rule book or even moral code ever could. This utter commitment to liberty came also to be reflected in Quaker political beliefs in times when religious diversity was at least tolerated. Nevertheless, the long-term impact of some of the demands of the establishment continued to have negative impact on the Quaker business community into the early decades of the twentieth century. The principles of religious liberty in both thought and practice became hard-wired into the Quaker conscience. Not every other aspect of Quaker life did so. Both of these factors played a part in the development, and, indeed, the conundrum at the heart of this chapter. Liberty—religious, political and economic, but countered by developments in belief and practice in a variety of directions. This, however, is simply the first building block.

2.2 *Quakers and Politics*

Political action and involvement by Quakers was severely restricted prior to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 which opened up the possibility of public office. However, although an essential marking post along the way—and reflective of greater religious and political toleration—prior to the repeal many Quakers had become ‘occasional conformists’ either to enable some political involvement in a town or perhaps also, for a prominent local business leader, to

enhance status. In addition, the growth of new cities under charter (rather than ancient cities controlled by guilds) also aided the way for Quaker involvement in politics. The quietist tradition of Quakerism rather mitigated against political involvement. Indeed, although it is not fair to say that the annual Epistle from the Yearly Meeting was unpolitical—amongst the strictures against arms, to attend worship and conduct family prayers—there are reflections upon the slave trade and the condition of the poor. However, it is impossible to read these letters without concluding that these writings were essentially pietistic; that the true Christian life consisted in a separation from the affairs of this world in spiritual submission to God. So, in 1763, we read, ‘we beseech you, who are engaging in the Affairs of this Life, that in the first place, you seek carefully after his Favour, whose is the Earth and the Fulness thereof. . .’ (Yearly Meeting Epistle, 1763). Consequently, the advice on political involvement was negative. ‘We wish to caution all our members against entering into political parties,’ (Yearly Meeting Epistle, 1818, p. 454) and in 1832:

We, therefore, tenderly but earnestly exhort all our dear friends to be very careful that they do not, by involving themselves in political questions, endanger their religious welfare. (Yearly Meeting Epistle, 1832, p. 250)

Perhaps this Epistle and the history of Quaker quietism was not read by Joseph Pease, the first Quaker to enter Parliament, in 1833 as the member for South Durham. Pease had been elected in 1832 but was unable to take his seat due to his unwillingness to swear the oath; within a year the principle of affirmation had been passed. The Yearly Meeting Epistle mentions the acceptance of the principle of affirmation, but not the arrival of the first Quaker Member of Parliament.

In her survey of Victorian Quakerism, Elizabeth Isechei, describes the Friends outlook on politics as paradoxical. She points out that the Society of Friends was a ‘well organized pressure group, yet officially deplored interest and activity in elections and party politics’ (Isechei 1970, p. 193). The change, as it came, was rapid, ‘one of the most rapid and complete reversals of attitude in Quaker history’ (Isechei 1970, p. 193).

Joseph Pease was elected as a Whig. A railway magnate from a prominent Durham family, Pease was hardly radical. The door, however, had been opened and more radical voices began to be heard. Outside of Parliament, Joseph Sturge and Joseph Metford entered the fray, the latter faced a reaction within the Society and was silenced. He later allied with the Chartists causing further disquiet. In 1843 John Bright entered Parliament for the first time and became the individual in whom religious freedom and liberty and radical politics combined, not only with each other but also with economic liberty. This coalition of interests came about partly due to the perfect storm of the battle over the Corn Laws.

Slowly, but surely the number of Friends in Parliament increased. The alliance with Whig and then Liberal causes was natural due to the alliance of the motifs of religious and political freedom. The transformation of the Tory Party into a party of Free Trade and the advent of Liberal Unionism over Gladstone’s policy of home rule for Ireland destroyed the precise identification. So too did much disappointment with the social reform of Liberal governments. The Tories, not least under Disraeli, but

with patriarchs such as Shaftesbury thundering in the Lords, made much more progress. In a way this simply illustrates the conundrum we are concerned with. Although only one Quaker entered Parliament as a Conservative in Victoria's reign, from 1886 there were Friends on both sides of the House (Isechei 1970). Many were industrialists. There were also ex-Quakers. Quakers, Cadbury among them, also played increasing roles in local government. However, without question, the outstanding individual was John Bright. Radical politics and free-thinking Quakers in Parliament; the second key building block.

2.3 *Quakers in Business*

Perhaps if the Quakers had been more ordinary workers, or at least were more obviously representative of working class social interests, this ideological alliance of religious, political and economic radicalism might not have come about in the way that it did. However, despite the Quaker resistance to the elites of Church and state, the Friends were themselves an elite of a different sort.

Abraham Darby (1678–1717) was the Quaker founder of a dynasty of ironmasters. Arthur Raistrick notes the influence:

A scrutiny of the iron trade during the eighteenth century soon reveals that the Quakers were a very prominent element in the structure of the industry, and were contributing heavily, not only by the provision of capital, but by technical improvements, to the trade's advancement (Raistrick 1993).

The 'free thinking', 'free-spirit' of Quakerism appealed more to artisans, merchants and middling sort than it did to ordinary workers (who were often deeply conservative in social and political attitudes). Since these groups were highly intelligent and often had some resources they were faced with the problems of being excluded from not only civic office but also the universities. Consequently, they turned their brilliant minds to science, technology and to business. It is perhaps, therefore, slightly less surprising that Quakers emerged into banking and finance—the origins of both Barclays and Lloyds lie with the Quakers, the foundation of Friends Provident in 1832 is a more explicit reminder. The extent of Quaker business involvement in manufacturing is, comparative to their size, really rather startling. Nevertheless, from shoes to chemicals (Clarks to Crosfield), biscuits to pharmaceuticals (Huntley and Palmer to Allen and Hanbury), not even to mention chocolate (Frys and Cadburys) the prominence of the Quakers is unmistakable. Hilton suggests around 5% of businesses were Quaker—a reminder that the overwhelming majority were not, but a proportion 50 times greater than their proportion of the general population (Hilton 2008).

In his survey of politics and dissent in the nineteenth century, David Bebbington provides evidence of the social class of the Society of Friends. Drawing on the work of Hugh McLeod, Bebbington notes that between 1885 and 1913 at Quaker weddings in inner London, 'more husbands were employers or managers than were manual workers of any kind.' Hence his conclusion that Quakers 'largely because of

their distance from popular religion, normally possessed a higher proportion of professionals and employers than other denominations' (Bebbington 1982, p. 4).

The Quaker firms were often family businesses—this enabled control to be maintained and provided a locus for the employment of future generations. Few remained so as the nineteenth century moved into the twentieth in the light of easier accessibility to limited liability from 1855 onwards. The Friends, however, remained prominent, not least through the series of Quaker Employers Conferences. This link between families and businesses through the Quaker network is well illustrated by the example of Joseph Crosfield and Sons, a chemical company established in Warrington, later absorbed by Lever Brothers. Joseph Crosfield's father, George, established a grocery business, and as Musson notes, the 'Crosfields' Quaker connections made possible young George's entry into what was apparently a fairly prosperous business, of which he soon acquired ownership' (Musson 1965, p. 5). Joseph was the fourth son, born in 1792. A key role of the Quaker business networks was to provide apprenticeships and Joseph was apprenticed to a Quaker business owner in Newcastle, Anthony Clapham, in trade as a chemist and subsequently as a soap manufacturer. Joseph learnt the trade and then returned to Warrington in 1815 to establish his own soap manufacturing business. The full story belongs elsewhere but also in good Quaker tradition the initial capital was provided from within the family (Musson 1965). What is also clear is that in accordance with the long sweep of Quaker manufacturing history, Joseph Crosfield had also been equipped with key scientific and technical knowledge to enable him to establish his business. Joseph also involved himself in Warrington's local politics from the 1820s (another Quaker who did not read the Epistles from the Yearly Meeting), naturally, of course, as a radical and Liberal. He was an advocate of both political reform and free trade (opposing tariffs on soap), subscribed to the Anti-Corn-Law League and admired Bright (Musson 1965).

Many other stories could be told and can be read elsewhere. The point here is to illustrate the Quaker business heritage and to explain some of its characteristics. This is the third of our building blocks in explaining the Quaker commitment to free trade and yet complexity if not ambiguity in wider areas of social reform. The name of John Bright is now arising regularly and it is to Bright and the battle over the Corn Laws that we must now turn.

2.4 John Bright and the Corn Laws

The abolition of the Corn Laws did not occur in a vacuum. Neither was opposition to the protectionist cause unified. Was the objective access to cheap food for the poor or relief and encouragement for the manufacturing interest? The repeal of the Corn Laws was simply one aspect, albeit perhaps the most publicly potent, of the dismantling of mercantilism and sure but steady advances in favour of free trade. Hence, we should not be surprised to see change and development in opinion. Indeed, the defeat of Charles Villiers' motion for an enquiry into the operation of the Corn Laws on 18th March 1839 saw Shaftesbury and Peel both in the lobby in

defence of the agricultural interest; within a few years both had changed their mind. Joseph Pease, the Quaker MP, was in same voting lobby; another Quaker, John Bright, was a leading advocate of abolition. A degree of caution in interpretation is advisable. Indeed, it was the defeat of Villiers' motion (342–195) that led to the Manchester branch of the Anti-Corn Law Association, which had been instituted in 1838, transforming, on 20th March 1839 into the national Anti-Corn Law League.

Earl Grey's Whig government, elected on the back of the 1832 Reform Act, looked both ways at the same time when it came to tariff reform. What really sealed the fate of the Corn Laws was the economic depression in the period after 1837. The tussle between agriculture and the landed interest on the one hand and trade and manufacturing on the other was a debate over both future prosperity and the ultimate source of wealth (Hilton 2008). The economic slump and a financial deficit finished off the Corn Laws notwithstanding the fact that Prime Minister Peel was elected to defend them. In 1842 Peel raised taxes and reduced tariffs; crucially income from import duties remained steady. Alongside this were supply shortages—as manufacturing suffered workers were unable to be supplied with bread at reasonable cost whilst agricultural incomes were protected. Ultimately it was this juxtaposition that changed Tory minds. The failure of the 1845 Irish potato crop was then simply the immediate catalyst.

Bright, together with Richard Cobden, who was the Radical MP for Stockport from 1841–1847, campaigned both inside and outside of Parliament. The Anti-Corn Law League was extraordinary. Meetings, petitions, speeches—they brilliantly captured the mood, a watershed in both culture and economics. The Chartists felt side-lined in their demands for political reform, and the League managed to invest their cause with religious fervour both literally in some respects, but also with the evangelistic zeal and indeed the theatre of their activities.

Bright made his maiden speech in the House of Commons on the topic pleading 'for the total abolition of the Corn Law, and for the adoption of the principle of perfect freedom of trade. The Corn Law is the main pillar in the system of monopoly' (Hansard, 7th August 1843). Bright's radicalism was genuine. He lamented the loss of the radical edge of the industrial bourgeois after the victory on the Corn Laws (Hilton 2008). In the debates leading up to the formal abolition bill he argued that 'we have always advocated the repeal of the Corn Laws, because they were unjust, in defiance of the laws of God, and an odious abuse of the laws of man' (Hansard, 17th February 1846). This reminds us that the clash over the Corn Laws had religious overtones. Many dissenting ministers lined up with the repealers, advocating free trade as a divine principle. Rather different from the more retributive tenor of traditional evangelical and other Christian economics from the established church which ranged from the near fatalism of Malthus to the moral retribution of rewards and punishments of Chalmers. As Hilton notes, 'orthodox believers were often scandalized by this way of blaming economic distress on Corn Laws rather than on original sin' (Hilton 1993, p. 247).

The Corn Laws finally fell, in terms of the second reading in the House of Commons of the abolition bill, on 27th March 1846. Royal Assent came a few months later. The majority was 88, the Conservatives split 2-1 against repeal—with

Peel in the minority, whilst the Liberals were (nearly) united in support. Peel fell from office.

How then does this narrative fit with the interests and values of Quakers?

Many Quakers remained uneasy with Bright and the activities of the League fearing for the reputation of the Society (Walvin 1998).

The Quakers were, of course, well represented among the manufacturing interests, and mainly Liberals for all the reasons previously given. So, at least part of the complexity—not least given the ambiguity of the Quaker industrialists towards protective legislation for children and workers—is whether they were driven by economic self-interest. Bright undoubtedly had blind spots—perhaps because so much social legislation in the nineteenth century came from the Tories—but his vision was large and expansive and had a social context. Bright essentially argued that new and freer markets were part of the solution to social distress and would not simply lead to a fall in wages. Indeed, artificial protection of the price of corn had led to ‘a high aristocracy and a poor tenantry’ not to mention poorly cultivated land. Farmers, he argued, had been protected into ‘a state of decrepitude’ (Hansard, 17th February 1846). The opening up of trade would provide food to starving people. Yet his statement to the House of Commons on 15th March 1844 that there was something worse than working 22 out of 24 hours in a day, and that was starving to death, was certainly indefensible (Hansard, 15th March 1844). Bright’s belief in freedom was also a belief in the freedom to dispose of one’s own labour as one pleased. Though for a child, even in an enlightened industrialist’s factory, it is difficult share the optimism.

3 Quakers and Social Responsibility

3.1 *The Quaker Conscience*

Did the Quakers possess social conscience? The evidence is significantly in their favour.

Two things emerged from the early history of the Quakers and the attendant persecution.

First, was an awareness of suffering. Well into the nineteenth century the Yearly Meeting received reports of sufferings—local Friends facing fines, sometimes crippling, for non-payment of tithes or church rates. There were also some imprisonments for refusing military service (Yearly Epistle, 1810, p. 151). So, although the nature and perhaps the intensity of Quaker persecution may have changed from the seventeenth century, the fact of the oppression remained the same. The consequence of this was that principles of liberty and awareness of suffering were seared into the Quaker conscience.

Second, and to some degree consequently, the Friends developed an eagerness for change and an awareness of injustice (Walvin 1998). Hence Quakers became concerned with those who faced imprisonment as they had themselves experienced,

others who faced wider oppression and their own history of fighting for their liberties came to inhabit their consciences.

This conscience was expressed in a number of ways in the public arena and was not without areas of tension. One question which arises—and is significant for the conundrum at the heart of this chapter—is the extent to which the Quaker conscience extended beyond the boundaries of their own communities. Much of the working out of the Quaker conscience took place either in relation to other Quakers (that is, within the community) or increasingly in respect of wider, but local communities—soup kitchens, work as Poor Law Guardians and so on. However, in a number of respects, the Quaker conscience extended onto the national stage. Two particular examples are in relation to anti-slavery and also prison reform.

So, regarding the campaign against slavery, the extent and importance of Quaker involvement has been long recognised (Hilton 2008). Nine of the twelve members of the London Abolition Committee were Friends and the role of Thomas Fowell Buxton (from a Quaker family and at least an attendee at Quaker meetings) is acknowledged as significant. This campaign, characterised by meetings (Quakers knew how to conduct meetings), campaigns, political influence and lobbying, pamphlets and petitions both shook Quaker quietism but also brought the Quakers into co-operation and collaboration with the wider evangelical movement—the two movements shared both earnestness and moral conscience. A similar pattern can be seen in the work of Elizabeth Fry, part of the evangelical Quaker Gurney family. Compassion, dealing with poverty, social reform were matters that concerned religious and non-religious people across the entire political spectrum. Elizabeth Fry became a famous and prominent Quaker because of the zeal and drive she demonstrated in prison reform. In this instance it was a prominent individual who drove matters.

For those involved in business, the Quaker conscience expressed itself in several ways. Certainly, there was sometimes pressure exerted from within the Quaker community if their dealings raised concerns. More importantly, however, it was this Quaker conscience that drove entrepreneurship. Self-denial and abstinence prepared the way for the long wait of the entrepreneur for a return. It was this same conscience that dictated honesty in pricing, fair dealing, quality products, and, of course, in employment practices (Bradley 2007; Turnbull 2014).

Quakers were idealists and there was some tension between the ideal and the practical, whether in relation to war and peace, the slave trade or children employed in factories. Chartists broke up an anti-slavery rally to draw attention to slavery at home and Joseph Pease faced criticism for promoting anti-slavery whilst tolerating, it was alleged, oppressive working conditions in his own factories. Bright's commitment to free trade may even have left him exposed to claims that he down played the importance of anti-slavery—Peel pointed out his somewhat contradictory position (Isechei 1970). The Anti-Slavery society divided over the Free Trade question. As Walvin notes:

Economic self-interest versus ethical and theological outrage swirled around the subject of slavery throughout the nineteenth century, drawing Quakers into a complex, highly publicised and bitterly divisive political debate which many of them disliked and resisted (Walvin 1998, p. 149)

Perhaps the same conscience of liberty that encouraged John Bright to adopt free trade, inspired other Quakers to fight for social reform? Perhaps this also led to certain blind spots, but not only was there a Quaker conscience but it was formative both in business and social concern.

3.2 *Quaker Philanthropy*

How did Quakers become wealthy, how did they react to such wealth and how did they use it? We should not underestimate the reality of Quaker business wealth nor the tensions that it generated. John Gurney (banking), George Palmer (biscuits), Joseph Rowntree (confectionary), George Cadbury (chocolate) and Jon Horniman (tea) were amongst prominent individuals who became wealthy. Philanthropy was a natural outlet for a much wider range of people, but ever more so for those for whom simplicity of life style was part of their conscience and soul. Gurney noted that he had received chastisements from God on account of his wealth (Hilton 1993).

Philanthropy, at least during the Victorian era rather became an industry of its own. In the absence of significant social provision by the state (though the Poor Laws existed in order to provide some form of safety net, but this usually involved entering 'the workhouse') charitable provision in education and social welfare was extensive and significant, albeit patchy and inadequate in a number of ways. Indeed, certain characteristics of the voluntary movement were inimical to some Quaker values. In particular the tendency for voluntary charity work to be a rather publicly worn badge of the middle classes together the patronage and subscription lists of the societies was rather contrary to the normal Quaker approach. Consequently, a good deal of Quaker philanthropy was local. In respect of education, the Quakers founded their own schools. Nevertheless, social need was such that many business leaders and other people of means and wealth considered it a central part of their duty to society (and for some to their God) to use their wealth for the relief of need and for social good. This approach was not restricted to religious motivations, evangelical or otherwise, and nor was it unique to Quakers. However, there is evidence that in second half of the nineteenth century perhaps three-quarters of such philanthropic enterprises were under evangelical control (Heasman 1962). Quaker conscience would make Quaker people natural philanthropists and the relationship of Quakers and evangelicals in this period merely reinforces the part that the Friends played. Indeed, the most prominent Victorian Quaker philanthropists were evangelical (Isechei 1970). Thomas Chalmers, a prominent evangelical, acknowledged this partnership (Hilton 1993). There 'can be no doubt that the part played by Quakers on the philanthropic scene was wholly disproportionate to their limited numbers' (Isechei 1970, p. 212). The scene of Victorian philanthropy was one of 'chaotic vitality' and Quaker influence was dominated by the successful and wealthy (Isechei 1970, p. 212).

3.3 *Quakers as Employers*

The Quaker business owners were compassionate employers with a genuine concern for their workforce. The questions which arise for us are whether the Quakers were unique (they were not), the degree to which they pioneered good practice (to an extent, considerable in some respects) and areas where they may not have acted with complete propriety (a few). Yet the Quaker employers have left for us a legacy not only of good employee provisions, but also of excellence in business practice, in honesty, integrity, in pricing and quality. Perhaps it is this combination of factors which enables us to describe the Victorian Quaker entrepreneurs as remarkable. The picture we can draw is fascinating, if complex. Not all Quaker businesses succeeded or became household names. Many successful Quaker business magnates left the Society of Friends, but not all. Some found wealth too much to bear in the light of the spiritual strictures of the Society, but many others found philanthropic outlets.

First, then, were the Quaker employers unique? In short, no. Quakers were not alone in seeking to be good employers. There were many enlightened entrepreneurs, some religiously motivated, often by a wider non-conformity rather than simply Quakerism and some not at all. Examples include Titus Salt and William Lever who remained ardent Congregationalist Christians throughout their lives. The reality was that it was Midland and Northern cities that were the centres of new industries, often newly enfranchised, the homes of Liberal not Tory tradition and of nonconformity rather than the Established Church.

One of the characteristics of both Cadbury at Bournville and Rowntree at York was the establishment of voluntary societies for the general welfare of employees. These societies ranged from libraries, savings banks, clothing clubs, to recreational and sporting clubs (Turnbull 2014; Walvin 1998). The voluntary society was one of the characteristic methods employed by those concerned with social welfare and social reform in the nineteenth century. They represented a genuine attempt to improve the conditions and welfare of workers and others who suffered in an urban industrial society. They were characterised by local control, a combination of philanthropy, micro finance and social enterprise. More recent scholarship has criticised the power relationships, the paternalism and the guilt complexes of the middle class. This is unfair not only because of a reading back of contemporary social values but also because it fails to recognise the real impact that such societies had. Perhaps the model villages, extraordinary in many respects, though not uniquely Quaker, epitomise both the strengths and the weaknesses. A concern for housing, light, space recreation and welfare all being central features, together with schemes for purchase were enlightened. Certainly, these ideas foreshadowed the 'garden city movement.' Yet, there was a paternalism which could fall into oppressiveness. However, we should not judge too harshly. The Quaker employers may not have been unique in this regard, but that does not make them any less genuine.

Second, to what extent were the Quaker employers pioneers? There is some evidence that especially as the nineteenth century drew to a close that the Quakers were more pioneering than some in extending and expanding their welfare provisions

in respect of basic working conditions. Long hours and low pay, the dismissal of young men at 21 years of age, and women upon marriage, were the norm inside and outside of the Quaker factories. Trade unions were seen as antithetical to Quaker principles. However, over time the Quaker employers did move to introduce half-day holidays and a more structured approach to wages and conditions. Crosfields managed to reduce hours and not wages, and all the employers moved to a position of setting out clearly the terms and conditions of employment. Rowntree established a pension scheme in 1906 from age 65—two years earlier than the first state provision, from age 70, and all three of the chocolate magnates appointed dentists and medical officers. Most of the Quaker employers' encouraged 'sick clubs' to provide for wages whilst ill. George Palmer of Huntley and Palmer established a sick fund in 1849, a library and reading room in 1854 and a penny bank to encourage thrift in 1868 (Bradley 2007). A pension scheme and factory outings also featured.

Third, were there any failures or blind spots? Yes. The most important one is the use of child labour in at least some Quaker factories against the increasingly prevailing national opinion. To that we will return in our conclusion. Huntley and Palmer had 12-hour days, no paid holiday and management raised and lowered wages twice a year (Bradley 2007). There is also the infamous case of the women's matchgirls' strike at Bryant and May in 1888 in protest at low pay and poor conditions leading to the foundation of the first woman's trade union. The original founders of the firm were Quakers and there remained Quaker influence on the Board, at least nominally so. However, the firm had already incorporated before the strike and the ethos of the firm had certainly moved some way from that of the founders. We should neither condemn nor whitewash. The incident is a reminder of the complexity, of Quaker decline, the rise of trade unionism and the difficulty of passing ethical culture down the generations, Quaker or otherwise.

In some respects, it is quite difficult to be certain of the extent of good employment practices by the Quakers. More work needs to be done on specific companies in respect of wages, hours and welfare provision. However, overall it is probably fair to say that in some respects the Quaker employers reflected the norms of the times, but that their concern for their workforce was genuine, extended beyond the factory gate, and hence in a number of ways they were pioneers, early adopters and prepared the way for a more rigorous and fairer approach to working conditions. Enlightened, but not unique. The major blind spot was child labour and hours of labour where they were not pioneers. The main purpose of this chapter is not to excuse such blind spots but to provide a proper explanation. Part of the picture is the recognition that in many other respects the Quakers were at the forefront of reform.

4 Conclusions

The conundrum with which we started this chapter was that of how Quakers managed to simultaneously embrace free trade and utterly fail to support proper working conditions in their factories for children and at the same time come to be seen as model employers.

The failure to support the proper protection of children and young people is an inexcusable blind spot caused by a combination of political and class prejudice and an obsession with the abolition of the Corn Laws in the interests of free trade that blinded the very Quakers in whom a social conscience was so deeply rooted.

However, there are several factors which do help to explain the conundrum and leave us with a significantly more positive picture of Quaker industrialists.

First, we have shown unequivocally that Quaker conscience was character and life-forming and influenced Quaker practice both within and outside of the business enterprise. Quakers were disproportionately represented in industry and for the most part that was a positive influence. Their passion for liberty and freedom was applied in the economic as well as the social arena.

Second, we have demonstrated that the motifs of conscience and liberty were very deep rooted within the Quaker character and that this led to a highly developed social conscience. Although for other reasons this conscience was sometimes expressed primarily towards other Quakers there is ample evidence also of wider concerns both locally and nationally. The wider influence of evangelicalism is important here as this was a unifying factor in much social reform and, indeed, due to the moral code, at least some scepticism towards the consequences of economic freedom.

Third, we have shown the Quaker's were pioneering industrialists and employers in a number of respects. The Quaker employers certainly reflected many of the accepted practices at the time which did not mark them out as enlightened; however, it is also the case that they were at the forefront of development of more progressive industrial and working practices, proper provision and care for the workforces and indeed a wider concern for their communities.

In addition to these factors we need to recognise the development of Quaker views over time. If one might put it this way, the emphasis on free trade moderated and the commitment to good employment practices increased as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth. Views are not static and that is true for the Quaker as much as anyone else.

The Quakers were not unique. Many successful Quaker business magnates found it very difficult to maintain the cultural practices and expectations of the Friends. However, the history of the Friends means that the values which formed and shaped them were seared very deep into their consciences. The consequences for business and business practices were thus largely positive, as indeed they were for the wider community. The 'enlightened Quaker businesses' are not a myth but a reality. A reality, though, that was not without its complexities.

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