

Quakers & the First World War

LIVES & LEGACIES

The Friends' Ambulance Unit



Contents

Page

Introduction	3
The Birth of an Ambulance Unit	4
Managing a Quaker Ambulance Unit	5
Training and Travelling	6
<i>'Find work that wants doing; take it; regularise it later, if you can'</i>	7
A Unit on the Move	8
The Aide Civile Belges	9
Henry Basil Darby - Alerting America to Civilian Crisis	10
Entertainment – Time Off from Duties	11
Conscription and Conscience	12
The General Service Section (GSS)	13
Hospitals and the FAU	14
Marion Cadbury – Youngest British Red Cross Nurse Serving Overseas?	15
Uffculme Hospital	16
Uffculme's Magazine – <i>The Swallow</i>	17
The London Hub and Fundraising	18
The End of the War	19
Olaf Stapledon – Reflecting on FAU Ethics	20
FAU Reunions – The 'Old Sixteeners'	21
Legacies of the Friends' Ambulance Unit	22
Further Reading	23
Acknowledgements	23

Introduction

Faced by the First World War, Quakers wondered what should they do – fight against Germany, fight against killing, or find another way? The decisions they made would influence the Religious Society of Friends for decades to come.

The Religious Society of Friends – whose members are known as Quakers or Friends – believe that everyone can experience God and that there is something of God in everyone. The belief that all life is precious has informed the group's historic commitment to peace and peacemaking. When the First World War began in August 1914, these values were tested and within eighteen months were under even greater strain.

This booklet tells the story of the Friends' Ambulance Unit (FAU), founded by Quakers outside of the official structures of their faith. While it describes how the organisation came about and what it did, its contents feature Birmingham extensively for a number of reasons: the interests and location of the volunteers on the project, the nature and survival of the records, and the sheer volume of activity that took place in the city. Nevertheless, this booklet focuses on the people – Friends and non-Quakers – who

worked for the Unit in Britain and on the front line, and the medical, relief, and labour activities they undertook, in cornfields and battlefields, offices and trains.

This booklet is one of a series by the 'Quakers & the First World War: Lives & Legacies' collaborative project, run by Central England Quakers and the University of Birmingham and supported and shaped by volunteers. In many cases different volunteers have written different pages, and brief overviews of complex national and international events are included alongside detailed local stories from the central England area. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Voices of War and Peace First World War Engagement Centre, the project builds on the 2015 exhibition *Faith & Action: Quakers & the First World War* held at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

The Birth of an Ambulance Unit

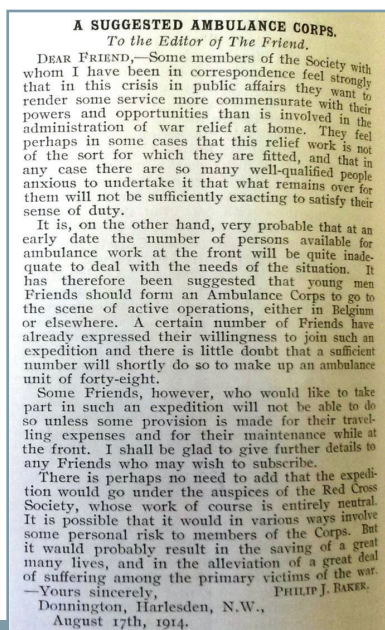
Soon after Britain declared war on Germany, Meeting for Sufferings – an executive committee of Quakers in Britain – was called to decide the formal response of Friends. This gathering on 7 August 1914 enabled many informal discussions to take place. It was in one of these that the idea for an ambulance unit first took shape.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young, a journalist who had been in Belgium reporting for the Cadbury-owned *Daily News*, described how little medical care was provided for the invaded country's soldiers. Listening to Young, among more senior figures, was Philip Baker (the young and athletic vice-principal of Ruskin College, Oxford).

Consequently, Baker wrote an appeal calling for volunteers and donations for an ambulance corps operating under the auspices of the British Red Cross, which was published in the Quaker magazine *The Friend* on 21 August (pictured right).

The appeal met with controversy. One letter to the publication, signed Henry T. Mennell, voiced the stance of many: *'a Quaker Ambulance Corps [going] to the seat of war and [forming] an essential and necessary part of the fighting force'* was *'scarcely consistent with the views and principles of Friends'*.

'The primary aim of the Army Medical Core and Field Hospitals, of which the Red Cross work forms a part' was, argued another correspondent, 'to 'patch up' the [army] unit and get it back into the firing line. Was this to be the contribution of the 'eager and ardent' young Friend...?'



▲ Appeal letter written by Philip Baker, 1914. Reproduced with the kind permission of The Friend © The Friend

Managing a Quaker Ambulance Unit

As soon as the idea for an ambulance unit struck, a body that helped to steer the group and manage its interests and staff began to form. This body would later become known as the 'Committee of the Friends' Ambulance Unit'. The Committee consisted of well-connected men and important Quaker figures, and promoted the idea that conscientious objectors were active, principled people of faith.

Sir George Newman headed the Committee throughout the war. Newman was a renowned public health specialist and Chief Medical Officer to the Government's Board of Education. Other members included six Quaker MPs – Arnold S. Rowntree, Percy Alden, J. Allen Baker, Joseph A. Pease (Lord Gainford), T. Edmund Harvey and J. W. Wilson – and two Justices of the Peace, one of whom, John Henry Lloyd, lived in the central England area.

Among the 28 who had served on the Committee by the end of the war, were a historian (William Charles Braithwaite), a scientist (Dr Leonard Doncaster), a journalist (Winthrop Young), and a leading surgeon (Sir Rickman J. Godlee).

The Committee shaped how a Quaker ambulance unit would be able to operate in a war zone through meetings with Sir Arthur Stanley. Stanley was Chairman of the Joint Committee of the British Red Cross and the Order of St John and brother to Lord Derby, a senior Government figure for the war. Such connections would come to be of service to conscientious objection (see p. 9).

The Committee also oversaw the everyday running of the Unit, from helping raise funds and obtain supplies to supporting individual volunteers who needed a helping hand. The spiritual life of volunteers was always uppermost in the Committee's minds, and they also made sure members overseas received support in their faith.



Training and Travelling

Baker's appeal gathered over 80 male volunteers at Jordans, the historic Quaker site in Buckinghamshire, in early September 1914. This initial training camp – aimed at preparing what were at first overwhelmingly young, well-off men for the stresses of a war zone – set a pattern for the next four years.

Woodbrooke Quaker college in Birmingham had offered its facilities, and some courses took place at York (Yorkshire) and Oxhey (Hertfordshire), but Jordans remained the main centre throughout the war.

During their several weeks of training, most of the volunteers lived 'under canvas' in tents, and there were activities designed to 'toughen up' the men; these included extended treks and other physical exercise, such as heavy stretcher carrying. Field cookery and basic hygiene was taught.

Trainees studied and took official examinations in first aid and home nursing from the two bodies that made up the wartime Joint Committee of the British Red Cross and Order of St John, under which the Unit would operate.

However, this training did little to prepare the many naive recruits for the blood and horrors they would encounter.

After some confusion, the First Anglo-Belgian Ambulance Unit (as it was then called) set out from Dover on 31 October 1914, in khaki and unarmed. Their journey became legendary. Just into open seas, the volunteers helped rescue sailors from a torpedoed ship and returned them to port. On their eventual landing at Dunkirk, the Unit tended hundreds of wounded soldiers left on straw in dark train sheds. The encounter was shocking. T. Corder Catchpool, a Leicester-born Friend, said one soldier was *'laughing bitterly when I turned away to vomit'* at the sight of the injuries.



▲ Top Image:

FAU training in civilian clothes, LSF TMSS 881 JOR 32

© Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

▲ Bottom Image:

Trained Unit members lined up in uniforms LSF TMSS 881 PHOT 51

FAU © Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

'Find work that wants doing; take it; regularise it later, if you can'

Dunkirk was quickly established as the permanent base of operations. But, aside from its emergency intervention at the train sheds, the 'Foreign Section' of the corps, as they became known, was still without a precise remit.

In these early days of chaos – or what members later considered the organisation's 'romantic period' – the body began to adopt the approach that would come to be their motto: *'Find work that wants doing; take it; regularise it later, if you can'*. They also formally adopted the name, the 'Friends' Ambulance Unit'.

So it was that a party of men ventured out into Belgium to see if they might offer assistance to anyone. At Woesten, a village just outside of Ypres, they began to establish a motor ambulance outpost. Such work would eventually carry some members almost as far south in France as Paris and move volunteers from civilian assistance to being embedded in French military convoys.

Shortly after the FAU had arrived at Woesten, the city of Ypres underwent a decimating bombardment. Joining efforts with Catholic priest Charles Delaere and a contingent of nuns, the FAU helped civilians, evacuated people and delivered humanitarian relief. These collaborative efforts, according to Geoffrey Winthrop Young, ensured that the Unit *'[overcame] the suspicion and nervous terrors of the rescued Flemish peasantry [and] gained their confidence sufficiently'* for *'them to adopt'* measures to stop typhoid.

A Unit on the Move

The FAU was often an organisation on wheels and water. The responsiveness of the Unit – born of the need they saw around them and the necessity to find work for the survival of a wartime organisation with pacifist foundations – ensured that their activities expanded dramatically from their early days at Dunkirk.

Motor ambulances remained at the forefront of operations. As well as civilian aid, many ambulance personnel came to have experiences closest to the ordinary men in the trenches. From Woesten, the Unit went on to form Sections Sanitaires Anglaises (SSAs) 13, 14 and 19; their names indicated their place in the French military medical treatment and evacuation system.

Train ambulances (numbers 5, 11, 16 and 17) were also pivotal to the Unit's work: cooperating with the British authorities ensured that the FAU was permitted to continue operating. Train labour was under military authority and monotonous, yet it helped injured men stay alive, get to hospital, and return home.

In 1916 the FAU provided staff for two hospital ships, which, like their train counterparts, cared for evacuated,

sick men. While the *Western Australia's* voyages were between France and England, *Glenart Castle* sailed extensively in the Mediterranean. This labour, again under military authority, ceased after the threat of torpedoes from German submarines was judged too severe.

A 1915 lull in the work the FAU could find in France and Belgium, and the perceived need from Italy entering the war, resulted in some of its members travelling further afield. While the Anglo-Italian Ambulance Unit grew from key figures associated with the FAU – including Stratford-upon-Avon-born historian G. M. Trevelyan, and nursing volunteer Irene Noel and her now husband, Philip (Noel) Baker – it was a separate and diverse organisation; of its initial 66 members, 16 were Quaker.

The Aide Civile Belges

In April 1915, the Aide Civile Belges (ACB) was formed between the Friends' Ambulance Unit and two hands-on women: the Countess van den Steen de Jehay, director of a nursing school in Brussels; and Countess Louise d'Ursel, a lady-in-waiting to the Queen of the Belgians. The collaboration developed from medical work begun in 1914 in Ypres (FAU) and at Poperinghe (Jehay).

The ACB *'dealt purely with civilians, upon whom the burden of warfare in the fighting area [was] much more severe than [was] generally realized. Beginning with an effort to cope with the immediate needs of the inhabitants and refugees in Ypres and Poperinghe, the area'* covered spanned *'uninvaded Belgium'* and much of the Department du Nord in France.

The ACB's activities were diverse. These included the establishment of two orphanages and two *'experimental schools'*, the evacuation of children to Paris, finding employment for out-of-work lace-makers, providing fresh water and pasteurised milk, and other invaluable public health measures connected to a typhoid epidemic.

Civilian medical assistance remained at the centre of ACB work. The Sacré Coeur Hospital at Ypres and the

Hôpital Elisabeth, Poperinghe – two sites where the FAU/ACB operated – were both forced to move after continued bombardment. Aid posts remained nearby and patients were thereafter cared for in two locations in the outlying areas: under canvas and in a museum!

However, tensions had already arisen between the parties involved in the ACB. At the heart of these were FAU concerns about how Poperinghe was being run, and that the funds they had allocated for civilian care there were contributing to what was increasingly becoming a military hospital. While the FAU continued to offer humanitarian aid throughout the First World War, its deep involvement with the ACB ceased in mid-1916.

Henry Basil Darby – Alerting America to Civilian Crisis

When war was declared, Basil (as he was known) was a metal broker living in Edgbaston, Birmingham, a birthright Quaker from a wealthy industrial family. The 23-year-old quickly joined Jordans training camp, and was among the first group of volunteers to leave for Dunkirk.

Basil made his way between France and Belgium and through the ranks. From May 1916, he worked in the Search Party, who went house-to-house to find typhoid cases, investigate sanitation, and encourage inoculation. On New Year's Day 1917, he was put in charge of the Civilian Health and Sanitary Section.

The US joined the war in April 1917. The American Red Cross (ARC) approached Basil for details about the situation on the ground. He set about writing a report. After Belgium's invasion, he noted, fleeing refugees had found relative safety in the Ypres area. The *'conditions were the inevitable forerunners of privation and disease'*, and the FAU helped *'to stem the march of the typhoid epidemic'*.

Summer 1915 had *'[seen] a change for the better'*: people had adjusted and the British Army created a service industry and jobs. The boom

subsided quickly once organised services were introduced. Basil's 1917 report therefore focused on the plight of impoverished, exploited civilians, chiefly agricultural workers. He set out a stark warning that matters would deteriorate.

Basil's report was *'one of the best and clearest statements of the situation'* that the ARC had seen. After internal circulation, it was quoted anonymously in *The Survey*, a pictorial and progressive US magazine; Basil therefore helped shape international humanitarian response.

Basil continued to work for the FAU until it was disbanded in early 1919. For his wartime service, he was awarded the *Chavaliers de l'Ordre de la Couronne* by the King of Belgium.

Entertainment – Time Off from Duties

FAU members were not always working. How staff amused themselves during time off had much in common with the men and women working directly for the armed forces. Diaries, play scripts and magazines all show how FAU workers in ambulance units and hospitals kept cheerful, but subtly commented on military life.

Colin Rowntree (1891-1967) was one of the first volunteers to arrive in France in 1914. In his diary he recorded that he was among the many who gathered for the *'FAU Anniversary Celebration.*

A year from the day we started from London. The concert included Revue 'The Great Offensive' by the Pop[er]inghe crowd.'

Indeed, soon after the volunteers arrived, a new entertainment troupe had been formed: the Faullies. The Faullies held revues and concerts regularly and, while light hearted, their plays, sketches and songs were often irreverent, mocking authority and wartime conditions.

Subversive humour was also found in the periodicals produced by different groups of the FAU. The magazines of the ambulance trains in particular

– such as *A Train Errant* and *Lines of Communication* – were especially rich, presumably as a response to their restrictive surroundings and routine working conditions.



However, as FAU member Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950) recalled, there were much simpler pleasures of being posted to a quieter place:

[the] driver and orderly would spend a peaceful few days by themselves in some hut or dugout with never an interruption. There was plenty of time for talk and reading, for sketching and letter-writing.

I remember many a pleasant meal with the French "brancardiers" [stretcher bearers] in a certain dug-out. The food, being French, was excellent. "Singe" ["monkey", the nickname for 'ration meat'] ... and vegetables were marvelously transformed. There was delicious dandelion salad.

Conscription and Conscience

As conscription loomed, the well-connected members of the FAU's steering committee used their position to create a space for conscience. MPs Arnold Rowntree and T. E. Harvey ensured the 1916 Military Service Act had a 'conscience clause', which meant 'work of national importance' was an alternative to fighting.

Behind-the-scenes negotiations between the steering committee and the Government's War Office established the FAU was 'work of national importance'. The Unit expanded. The 'General Service Section' was created, offering placements to those uncomfortable with ambulance work. All existing FAU members were exempted from conscription.

These moves caused controversy in the 'Foreign Section'. The tight-knit body of well-to-do men was fractured by absolutists leaving and less privileged, anti-war recruits arriving. The following are four examples of how members reacted to the ramifications of conscription.

Adam Priestly, an engineer 'associated with Quakers' and living in Stafford, quit the FAU. He was one of 35 conscientious objectors to be sent to France by the army in 1916, and sentenced to death by a court martial (later commuted). He spent time in prison and work camps.

Friend T. Corder Catchpool's desire to participate in the suffering of war shifted, from working alongside frontline soldiers, to standing with imprisoned conscientious objectors. He left the Unit and did not report for military duty. He was arrested at Woodbrooke, Birmingham, and spent much of the rest of the war in prison.

Laurence Cadbury, a Birmingham Quaker, considered joining the army at various points, but his sense of duty kept him with the Unit. Corder was a close friend. Laurence was sad Corder left, but frustrated that people's consciences hindered FAU work.

John W. Major, a non-Quaker from South Shields, entered the FAU after conscription. He was uncomfortable with the steering committee's decisions and working under military authority on Ambulance Train 16. Major's sensibilities aligned with traditional Friends'. After the war he became a Quaker.

The General Service Section (GSS)

*Under the Military Service Acts, military tribunals could order a conscientious objector (CO) to do 'work of national importance' (see separate booklet for further details). Many were referred to the FAU's GSS, which was primarily established for Friends. After the Government created the similar 'Pelham Scheme' for non-Quaker COs, the GSS intended there to be no '**preferential treatment for Friends**'. Ultimately, around 25%, or c.450, of FAU members were unconnected to Quakers.*

The Section placed most referrals in agriculture, which had a great need for workers, particularly after conscription. The rest were placed in '**many useful and necessary occupations**', including work in education, welfare, asylums, hospitals, food factories and flour mills.

Many had not done strenuous physical work before, and so spent several weeks training alongside FAU ambulance workers to 'toughen them up' and make them feel part of the Unit.

Many were then sent to work for sympathetic farmers in isolated situations, often far from home and on meagre wages, so local Friends were informed about GSS members moving to their area. Some men and their families were supported financially and socially by the FAU and local Quaker meetings.

One GSS agricultural worker was Francis 'Len' Temple, a skilful Church of England silversmith from Birmingham. Aged 27, he joined the Section following a referral from his tribunal. After FAU training, Len spent four months on a Dorset farm. In January 1917, he was transferred to a farm in Witham, Essex. After he was demobilised in December 1918, Len returned to Birmingham and became a Quaker.

George Mounsey, a member of the GSS organising committee, travelled constantly, making much-appreciated visits to workers like Len, and monitoring their working conditions and health. Unlike Len, many were not demobilised until 1919, when the GSS work of '**fitting square pegs into round holes**' ceased.

Hospitals and the FAU

The bedrock of FAU work in France and Belgium and in England was associated with hospitals. Like its other activities, these efforts grew from around their Dunkirk base and developed in response to the introduction of conscription in March 1916.

The FAU had taken up residence at the Hotel Kursaal in Malo-les-Bains on the outskirts of Dunkirk in 1914. Attempts to establish a hospital nearby soon paid off, thanks largely to two connected and capable women, Irene Noel and Amy Phipps Guest. The Villa de Saint Pierre acted as a convalescent hospital for wounded servicemen of different nationalities. A few civilians caught up in the bombardment from the air were also treated there. This sort of work continued in the FAU's own extensive purpose-built premises at Dunkirk, the Queen Alexandra Hospital.

In France and Belgium, the FAU provided hospital and medical care whenever and wherever it was needed, including at Casualty Clearing Stations near the front line. Back in Britain matters were both more stable and more controversial, with the FAU running or providing staff for four sites. The Unit's own hospitals were Haxby Road Hospital, York, established in 1915 on the

premises of the Rowntree factory, and Uffculme Hospital in Birmingham, opened in 1916.

Staff were sent to the Star and Garter Home, Sidcup, which was a long-term residential care home for men who had been extensively disabled by their war injuries. After conscription, volunteers also worked at King George's Hospital, London. According to Quaker scholar John W. Graham, the 110 men who went there were met by '*a hostile demonstration [by existing orderlies] against them on night of their arrival*', due to their stance against fighting in the war. Thereafter their lives were made as difficult as possible. After several months, the venture was '*regarded as a mistake*' and the Unit withdrew.

Marion Cadbury – Youngest British Red Cross Nurse Serving Overseas?

'Mollie' was the daughter of Elizabeth and George Cadbury, one of the two Quaker brothers who built the chocolate factory and village at Bournville, Birmingham. At 20, she volunteered to become a British Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment (BRC VAD) nurse in April 1915. She spent three months training at Queen's teaching hospital, Birmingham.

Mollie joined the FAU's St Pierre hospital, Dunkirk, with her close friend Olga Wilson (24), a Kidderminster Quaker. The two nurses – considered honorary members of the male-only Unit – were inseparable. They went on to work at the 3rd BRC Hospital, Abbeville, then the FAU's Alexandria Hospital, Dunkirk. In between shifts, the two cycled for miles; Mollie contrasted the cornfields, *'thick with cornflowers and poppies'*; and *'the main roads thick with convoys and dust'*.

Dunkirk was often shelled, which Mollie described as *'free exhibitions of fireworks'* that were *'pretty ear-splitting, and the whole place shakes and rattles.'* Perhaps because of the dangers, young VADs

were not usually stationed abroad; the woman who looked after c.600 overseas BRC nurses told Mollie she was the *'youngest member out here'*. It may also have been because of

encounters with the more-recently wounded; one serviceman Mollie cared for had his *'face burnt away with liquid fire ... most of his jaw and mouth [were] gone'*.

Olga returned to England unwell in June 1917 and left FAU work soon after. Mollie quickly followed.

The women were awarded *L'Insigne Spécial en Bronze*, a french medal for distinguished nursing. In 1918, Mollie married an Irish FAU member, Bill Greeves.



Uffculme Hospital, Birmingham

Uffculme was donated to wartime activities by Geraldine and Barrow Cadbury. The grand house had been used for Belgian refugees, but in December 1916 opened as a convalescent hospital run by the FAU and equipped by the Cadburys. Uffculme was part of the many-sited 1st Southern General Hospital for military casualties. It eventually offered 200 beds. Uffculme's management committee, and its financial supporters, came from key local Quaker families, including Tangye, Morland, Albright, Gibbins, and Southall.

Uffculme's opening was part of the post-conscription expansion of the FAU. Most of its staff had joined the Unit after conscription. Several of the senior staff had previously worked overseas. Matron Caroline Cattell was a trained nurse from London, who had joined the FAU in November 1914 and worked at St Pierre, Alexandra, and Abbeville. Patients at Uffculme not only arrived from France and Belgium, but from Serbia, Mesopotamia, Salonika and Egypt.

Hospital life was one of '*monotonous routine*', but could be lively. Along with the everyday mischievousness of the residents, there were regular sporting fixtures, competitions, and entertainments: '*Private Carlisle's clog dance was an unique feature*' of one autumn patients' concert.

There were other ways to occupy time. In May 1917 '*a nest of six rabbits was discovered in the Hospital grounds, and the welfare of these tiny animals has been the subject of much care on the part both of patients and staff.*' Animals often featured in hospital life – for instance, the '*Swan who failed to qualify as the Hospital mascot by reason of its morose and unpacific disposition was banished*' to the edges of the Uffculme estate!

Uffculme's Magazine – *The Swallow*

In March 1917, the first issue of The Swallow appeared. The monthly publication was designed to 'knit together' Uffculme's 'corporate life', and 'serve both as a record of our Hospital life and as a link to connect it with the outer world'. Unlike other wartime unit magazines, it was intended to be read and understood by everyone, not just members. It was therefore eclectic.

The first piece to appear in *The Swallow*, for example, was a story in which a fairy guided a boy, 'Alfred the Little' to Uffculme. The fairy explained briefly about a man who '*spent all his life in making sick and suffering people better again*'. When the two reached Uffculme, the fairy said "*That Red Cross means that the people who look after those who are sick and wounded in the big place we are going to are people who like to do what the loving man did, who lived and died so long ago.*" The man in the story was Jesus.

The Swallow could also be political and, in line with Quaker sentiments, had a keen sense of social justice. There were editorials about the merits of community action and trades unions, as well as what life

would be like for civilians and for war pensioners: '*After a war like the present we may expect a period of national exhaustion, wherein the country will be under the heel of any set of adventurers who may chance to hold the upper hand*'; '*The tyranny of the State in the future will be met and overcome by [a] new group-spirit of liberty*'.

The final issue was published in July 1918, amid worries about the new '*flue*' (Spanish Flu), the shortage of paper, and the handover of Uffculme from the FAU to military medical authorities.

The London Hub and Fundraising

A building in Weymouth Street in London acted as the stores department of the Unit, but was also a key stopping point for the various comings and goings of FAU personnel and associates.

In July 1917, for example, American Leah Cadbury had *'flashed in'* en route between Philadelphia and Uffculme, and a *'tall haggard figure in a uniform that once has been War Victims [Relief Committee] gray, suddenly appeared'*. This proved to be Dr Herbert Campbell Manning of Kent, who had recently left the FAU, but after *'many days and nights journey from the interior of Russia, [he] had had enough of Revolutions for the present thank you!'* – clearly having been caught up in the Bolshevik Revolution – and rejoined the Unit in France.

Because of its centrality to the FAU's logistics, Weymouth Street was never closed, not even over Christmas. The small staff was close knit, particularly so once meat rationing was introduced in Britain in 1918, when *'The vegetarian member of our Staff, popular before, is now rapidly coming to be considered as an indispensable asset to our little community'*!

Yet the community that supported the Unit was significantly larger than the staff at the London hub. Behind them sat countless others in Britain and abroad who made the FAU possible. Through the pages of Quaker magazine *The Friend*, published reports of the Unit's work, and regional, local, and Friends and family connections, the FAU received enough donations in money and material goods to continue operating throughout the war.

Donations came from individuals and from groups of people: the motor ambulances supplied via the British Red Cross, for example, were funded by *'a bewildering array of donors'*, including Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Coal Miners and Owners, the Hellenic Community of London, and *'the Fiji Islanders'*.

The End of the War

The Friends' Ambulance Unit was laid down in 1919. By the time it was disbanded, the FAU had trained over 1,700 volunteers, who included a number of women, despite being a male-only body. Many were sorry to leave the people with whom they had lived and served. Through war wounds, accident and sickness, the FAU had lost 21 volunteers; 17 former members also died.

Survivors from hospitals, ambulance work, civilian aid, the recreation huts (including 'The Pig and Whistle' and 'The Cat and Fiddle') that had been opened for soldiers at Dunkirk and St Pol, as well as the General Service Section and the London hub, returned to their peacetime lives.

Laurence Cadbury was one of the last members of the FAU Foreign Section working in France and Belgium. *'Now one is about to leave it, like I suppose thousands of other people,' he wrote, 'one realises that one has unconsciously acquired a vast amount of knowledge about a world which shortly will cease to exist.'*

Laurence returned home to Birmingham with a knighthood and the *Croix de Guerre*. Many other members of the FAU, as well as the women nurses who worked with them, had received mentions in

Despatches, citations, honours and decorations – from British, French, Belgian and Italian authorities.

When the FAU was laid down, it donated over £10,000 to the work of the Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee in Europe (including that in Austria and Germany), which continued well into the 1920s. Other funds went towards purchasing The Penn Club in London, which was envisaged as a place where former members could meet. The Club, now a bed and breakfast, remains connected to Quakers.

Olaf Stapledon – Reflecting on FAU Ethics

(William) Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950) was born in Wallasey, the Wirral, to a middle-class family. When the war broke out he had been working for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in Liverpool since 1912. For six months he had pondered what to do – 'Like so many others I loathed the war and at the same time felt an increasingly urgent call to be doing something about it.'

Although agnostic, he joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit in 1915, and served until 1919. Together with his company, Section Sanitaire Anglaise 13, he was awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery in transferring wounded soldiers under bombardment. It seems that he tossed the medal into a drawer after returning home and never looked at it again.

After the war Stapledon returned to lecturing for the WEA whilst studying philosophy at Liverpool. He published his thesis as *A Modern Theory of Ethics* in 1929 and then began writing fiction to disseminate his ethical ideas more widely. His novels have become seminal influences on modern science fiction. In *Last Men in London* (1932) he drew on his experiences in the FAU, described his ambivalence over being awarded his medal, and by implication questioned whether

pacifists in the FAU were complicit in warfare despite saving lives:

... that pacifists should display military decorations was too ridiculous. There was some debate, but the thing was done. Thus did these pacifists, hypnotized for so long by the prestige and glamour of the military, bring themselves to devour the crumbs of glory that fell from the master's table.

FAU Reunions – The ‘Old Sixteeners’

Reunions – informal and official – of former FAU members were held relatively frequently after the Unit had disbanded. Each segment, Section Sanitaire Anglaise, and ambulance train held their own. As time passed, meetings seemingly became less frequent, but for ‘Old Sixteeners’ their Golden Anniversary brought a new impetus to keeping in touch.

‘The Originals’ had arrived for work on Ambulance Train 16 (AT16) in France during the night of the 14 August 1915. The core FAU group came to number around fifty, mainly British men, though at least one was Australian, and four were Americans, including Felix Morley, who would later become a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and President of Haverford College.

At AT16’s fiftieth anniversary reunion in August 1965, the first Meeting for Worship *‘reminded’* those gathered (now aged between 65 and 81) *‘of the reasons for which we joined the F. A. U., the true fellowship we found on the train, and the satisfaction of doing even uncongenial work in the spirit of disinterested service’*. Several spoke; *‘all referred to the way in which this experience had influenced their lives in succeeding years’*.

Newsletters were thereafter exchanged annually, and casual and formal meetings happened, but gradually fewer members wrote and visited.

In 1980, Birmingham-based Alexander Pope-Russell concluded in the annual newsletter that while definitive news had not been heard from several people, *‘we can now assume that we are the Last Sixteen of the Old Sixteeners’*.

The final letter connected with AT16 found to date was written in 1982. In every newsletter and in their correspondence, the men who had met, worked, cared, laughed and shed tears on the ambulance train recalled their motto: *‘May Friendship dispel the shadows’*.

Legacies of the Friends' Ambulance Unit

The First World War activities of the FAU were seared into the lives of its members, their families and shaped their individual decisions and local Quaker meetings. Their long-term impact in sustaining life in the men, women and children they evacuated and nursed cannot be readily ascertained, but the FAU inoculated 26,211 people, medically treated at least 19,568 civilians, carried 277,417 civilians and military patients in motor ambulances, and evacuated 520,736 on ambulance trains. The wartime work of the Unit in Britain held businesses, hospitals, farms and communities together and therefore smoothed the transition back to peace.

When war came again in 1939, the pool of skills, experiences and personnel from the First World War were ready for service. Two of those who had served earlier, Arnold Rowntree and Birmingham Quaker Paul Cadbury, re-formed the Friends' Ambulance Unit.

Lessons learned in the field in 1914/1919 were carried forward and the motto refreshed, becoming '*Go anywhere, do anything*'. This the Unit did, operating in Africa, China, India, Syria and throughout Europe, including involvement in the liberation of Sandbostel (a Nazi detention camp) and aiding released camp prisoners, refugees and displaced persons in Germany.

The end of the Second World War did not immediately eradicate wartime measures; National Service was retained until 1959. The FAU was instrumental in creating a body for conscientious objectors to act in post-war and international service.

The twentieth-century work of the FAU and other international Friends was recognised by a 1947 Nobel Peace Prize, and arguably continues to inform humanitarianism and international Quaker links today.



► Second World War FAU ambulances, London c.1940 LSF TMSS 999_4_4 © Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

Quakers & the First World War

LIVES & LEGACIES

Further Reading

-T. Corder Catchpool, *On Two Fronts* (1918, reprinted 1971).

-Pink Dandelion and Rebecca Wynter (eds), special issue on Quaker responses to the First World War, *Quaker Studies* (December, 2016).

-Linda Palfreeman, *Friends in Flanders: Humanitarian Aid Administered by the Friends' Ambulance Unit During the First World War* (2017).

-Meaburn Tatham and James E. Miles, *The Friends' Ambulance Unit, 1914-1919: A Record* (1920).

-Various, *A Train Errant, being The Experiences of a Voluntary Unit in France, and an Anthology from Their Magazine* (1919).

The FAU feature briefly in John William Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919* (1922) <https://archive.org/details/conscriptioncons00grahrich>. William Olaf Stapledon's memories of the FAU can be accessed online: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/stapledon/olaf/friends/>.

The Friend is a valuable source for regular reports and correspondence about the FAU and the First Anglo-Italian Ambulance Unit. Copies are held at The Library of the Religious Society of Friends in London and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham.

Several collections held by The Library of the Religious Society of Friends in London were used to research this booklet, including the papers of Arnold Rowntree and the extensive official documentation of the Friends' Ambulance Unit. The Library has digitised the record cards of FAU personnel, which can be searched and seen online: <http://fau.quaker.org.uk/>. Their blog, and Quakers in Britain's 'White Feather Diaries', contains information about the FAU and other activities of Friends during the First World War.

Laurence Cadbury's papers are held by the Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham (quote from MS327/A/180). The letters of Marion Cadbury can be consulted at Birmingham

Archives & Collections in the Library of Birmingham. We are also indebted to the Darby family, who permitted us to read the papers of Basil Darby. The website of descendants of the Rowntree family has also been consulted <http://www.guise.me.uk/index.htm>. Material from Alfred Pope-Russell, temporarily housed at Woodbrooke in Birmingham, was invaluable for piecing together the story of the FAU reunions.

Acknowledgements

Authors

Christine Bagnall, James Kelly and Rebecca Wynter.

Project Contributors

John Babb, Christine Bagnall, Nina Caddick, Gethin Owain Evans, Rhiannon Grant, William Jackson, Janet Jones, James Kelly, Betty Hagglund, Andrew Harvey, Rachel Muers, Siân Roberts, Janet Scott, Nicola Sleapwood, Andy Vail, Senga Whiteman and Rebecca Wynter.

We would like to thank the AHRC Voices of War and Peace engagement centre for the funding that made this project possible. Thanks also to Professor Ian Grosvenor, Dr Nicola Gauld, Dr Kevin Myers, Dr Betty Hagglund, and all of our excellent volunteers and contributors, whose ideas shaped and informed this booklet and the project as a whole. Many thanks to Central England Area Meeting for all their input and to Claire Bowman, former Clerk. Sincerest thanks for the help and understanding offered by Melissa Atkinson, Libby Adams and all the staff at Friends House Library, as well as Jane Dawson and her team at Friends House. We would also like to thank: Dudley Quaker Meeting, the Friends Historical Society, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, *The Friend*, Jo-Ann Curtis at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Imperial War Museum, Eleanor Woodward and staff at Birmingham Archives, the designer, Katerina Portik, for her patience and skill, and the many readers from Central England Quakers who offered their thoughts on earlier drafts of the booklet.

Dr Siân Roberts and Dr Rebecca Wynter.



WOODBROOKE
MEET • STAY • LEARN



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

