

Quakers & the First World War

LIVES & LEGACIES

The Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee



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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 gives an overview of the international humanitarian relief work of the Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee (FWVRC) during the war itself, and in the interwar period. It provides a brief introduction to the complex subject of how Quaker relief developed in different national contexts. Friends conceived of their relief activities as part of their witness for peace, and the work inspired a long legacy, cemented by the connections made across borders and between Quakers and the people with whom they worked.

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.

Like the other booklets in this series, it highlights connections between Birmingham and the central England area and national and international events. 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 Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee

Friends have a long history of involvement in humanitarian relief. In addition to their well-known activism on behalf of enslaved people, Quakers were active in several conflicts and emergencies before 1914.

This included relief work in Germany during the Napoleonic Wars, 1805-16, and in Greece during the War of Independence from 1822. In the same year, famine in Ireland saw the beginning of Quaker aid initiatives there that would continue until the end of the nineteenth century. Quaker relief in Finland began during the Crimean War in 1856 and lasted for over ten years.

The Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee (FWVRC) was formally constituted in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, and adopted the Quaker star as its emblem. It was revived to provide aid in Bulgaria in 1876, and relief work continued in various forms in Eastern Europe for several years.

In the period immediately before the First World War, Quakers provided relief during the South African 'Boer'

Wars of 1899-1902, and for those caught up in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. During this latter conflict, Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting, like Quaker meetings elsewhere, raised funds to support Friend, Ann M. Burgess' work in Constantinople.

The Warwickshire War Victims' Relief Committee raised over £1,300 by the time it was stood down in March 1914. This figure would pale into insignificance when compared with the amount raised in the Central England area for relief work during the First World War.

Hilda Clark and the Re-Formation of the FWVRC

Hilda Clark (1881-1955) was the youngest child of the shoe manufacturer William Stephens Clark of Street, Somerset, and his wife Helen Priestman Clark. Hilda trained in medicine at Birmingham, before moving to the Royal Free Hospital in London, from where she graduated in 1908.

In London Hilda met her lifelong companion Edith Pye, who would join her in relief work during the First World War and in subsequent conflicts. Only a month after war was declared, on 4 September 1914, Hilda and Quaker Member of Parliament T. Edmund Harvey brought forward a concern to Meeting for Sufferings, an executive committee of Quakers in Britain, that relief work should be undertaken with civilian non-combatants.

Hilda proposed that the Meeting should *'support a movement to give medical and ambulance help to the non-combatants in France or Belgium'*,

and a committee was appointed. Hilda went on to undertake relief

work in France and Austria (see p. 6 and p. 14). Her sister, Alice, a historian at the London School of Economics, became secretary to the FWVRC subcommittee dealing with France.



The FWVRC's overall secretary was Ruth Fry (1878-1962), who held the post until 1923. Ruth was the daughter of a Quaker judge, and her sister Margery Fry was also actively involved in relief work (see p. 6). Ruth went on to write the history

of the FWVRC, which she entitled *A Quaker Adventure*.

Beginnings in France

In early November 1914, the first party of 33 FWVRC workers crossed to France led by Hilda Clark and T. E. Harvey. By 1918-1919 there were over 500 workers in 45 centres in France.

Hilda Cashmore of Bristol established the first field post at Vitry-le-François, in an area of north-eastern France devastated during the First Battle of the Marne.



From early 1915 until the end of 1917, the French relief work was led by Margery Fry, formerly Warden of the University of Birmingham's Women's Hostel, from her base at Sermaize in Northern France. Friends distributed clothing, bedding and furniture, and wooden homes were rebuilt to address the housing

shortage. By 1916 'garden villages' had been developed at Pargny and Sermaize, and a workshop for making prefabricated wooden homes was opened at Dole in the Jura. The workers also provided occupation for local women through needlework and embroidery schemes.

Agricultural relief and reconstruction formed a large part of the work. Seeds and plants were distributed, including some 24,000 fruit trees, and rabbits, goats, chickens and bees were reared.

Agricultural tools and machinery were supplied, and teams of workers toured the villages with threshing machines.

At the end of the war, the work was concentrated in the Verdun area in North Eastern France; land was ploughed in readiness for the returning civilian population and communal kitchen gardens were planted in several villages.

Maternity and Medical Work

The Quaker team in France also undertook medical work as civilian hospitals had been turned over to the military. The first initiative was the opening of a maternity hospital at Châlons-sur-Marne in December 1914.

As a trained nurse and midwife, the task of running the maternity hospital fell to Edith Pye, who remained there until the end of the war. After the war she joined Hilda Clark in Vienna.

In addition to the maternity wards, the hospital also provided a crèche for the children who would otherwise be alone whilst their mothers were in hospital. Treatment facilities for children and a weekly clinic were added later. In the period that the hospital was run by the Quaker mission, there were 981 births, and care was provided for 1,909 older children.

In 1919 the maternity hospital was handed over to a French committee to administer. A new building was constructed, designed by Melvin Cawl, one of the American workers who joined the relief work, and formally opened in 1922.

During the war, the Quaker Mission supported hospitals at La Source

and Le Chateau, Sermaize. It also helped run convalescent homes at Bettancourt, Samoëns, Entremont and Saint Rémy-en-Bouzément.

In addition to institutionally-based work, the team also fulfilled 'district nursing' functions in villages, and optical and dental work was also performed.

In July and August 1915 the Birmingham Quaker Barrow Cadbury visited the relief workers in France, including those at the hospital at Châlons. As he prepared to return home he wrote in his journal: *'And so with the homeward journey ends this sadly interesting visit which has given me insight into the sorrow, the devastation and destruction of life and property by this awful war, which I have seen in France and of which I can imagine the result in Belgium. I am thankful that there has been an opportunity for the Society of Friends to take some share in the alleviation of the sorrow and suffering.'*

The American Friends' Service Committee

On 6 April 1917 the United States joined the war. In response, American Quakers formed the American Friends' Service Committee (AFSC), and relief work became a joint undertaking between them and the FWVRC.

Following America's entry into the conflict, representatives of the various US Quaker branches met in Philadelphia on 30 April. Their aim was to evolve a common response to the war, and to find an alternative to military service for young Quaker men.

The AFSC was formed, and a short time later Rufus Jones agreed to become its first chairman. An office was established in Philadelphia, and training began for 100 potential workers at Haverford College campus. Training covered a broad range of work including housing, sanitation, emergency relief, first aid and disease prevention. The workers were also equipped with basic knowledge about Catholicism, France and the French.

A few men left for France in late August, where they joined their British colleagues, and a larger party

sailed in September. In France, the Americans were officially under the auspices of the American Red Cross.

The AFSC subsequently went on to work in Russia, Serbia, Austria, Germany and Poland. In *A Quaker Adventure*, Ruth Fry estimated that 780 Americans worked in relief during and after the war, alongside 1,070 British workers and a further 270 personnel in the London warehouse and office.

In practice, tensions emerged between the British and American relief workers, due to differences of background, theology and political outlook. The FWVRC and the AFSC also had different approaches to the work, with the Americans favouring more impersonal, mass relief in contrast to the British relief workers' emphasis on developing personal relationships with the recipients.

Refugee Camps in Holland

In 1914, large numbers of refugees fled from the fighting in Belgium to neighbouring Holland. After the fall of Antwerp that October, for example, some three-quarters-of-a-million people crossed the border.

T. E. Harvey and Dr Dyson Holdsworth visited Holland to investigate conditions, and Dutch former students of Woodbrooke Settlement (later College), in Birmingham, were contacted to ask how Friends could help.

Large camps known as *vluchtoorden* (flight-places) were established, with the most significant at Gouda, Ede, Uden and Nunspeet. At its height, the largest at Nunspeet housed 10,000 refugees. Philip Burt and Fred Rowntree approached the Dutch authorities to offer Quaker help in the camps.

From June 1915 the FWVRC had four workers in these camps. By the following March, when Birmingham Quaker, Catharine Albright, published an account of her visit to the camps in *The Friend*, there were 40 workers, about half of whom were Quakers. At this point, Ede housed 4,000 refugees,

Uden 6,000-7,000 people, and Nunspeet 4,000-5,000.

The camp workers provided occupation and recreation, deemed necessary for the wellbeing of the refugees. The women embroidered and made clothes, rugs, raffia shoes and baskets, while the men made toys and other wooden objects, mats, baskets and brushes. Friends also organised gardening activities and beekeeping, and provided clubs, educational classes, social and sporting events. Scout and guide groups were organised for the young.

Friends also built villages in the camps using pre-fabricated wooden houses introduced by Fred Rowntree. In Amereersfoort camp, a population of 1,000 lived in Village Elizabeth which was named after the Belgian Queen and included a street named after Rowntree.

Serbian Refugees in Exile

The war in the Balkans had begun before 1914, and Friends had been actively involved in relief in the area for some time. Quakers provided relief in Serbia itself, and in other countries where Serbs lived in exile.

After it re-formed in 1914, the FWVRC decided to collaborate with the Serbian Relief Fund (SRF), rather than send its own Quaker teams into the field. Ruth Fry, and Birmingham Quaker William A. Albright, joined the SRF executive.

Following the fall of Serbia in 1915, one third of the country's pre-war population fled; some half a million people crossed over the mountains into Albania, and around 200,000 are estimated to have died on route.

Thousands of Serbs ended up in exile in Corsica, Corfu and North Africa. Friends lent workers to the SRF and provided organisational and financial support. In December 1915, for example, Birmingham Friend J. Douglas Maynard went to Salonika to provide relief for Serbian refugees arriving there. In January 1916, Margery Fry travelled to Corsica where Kathleen Courtney, a non-Friend and former suffragist working for the FWVRC, was running a refugee colony and hospital.

Newcastle Friend Maurice Wilson was sent by the SRF to Bizerta in Tunisia. There, he was joined by his sister Francesca Wilson (see p. 15) and they established occupational workshops for injured Serbs in tailoring, cobbling and various handcrafts. They made goods out of wood and tanned leather, and wove carpets. In addition to providing recreation, a trained nurse offered massage for those with disabilities. The home closed in early 1919.

After the Armistice, Francesca Wilson went to Serbia, where she worked at an SRF hospital in Nish (Niš). Later she worked alongside the AFSC at Petch (Péc), where the American Quakers built houses and an orphanage, and provided medical relief through dispensaries and a hospital.

Refugees in Russia

In early 1916, Friends were increasingly concerned about the reports of acute distress in Russia. The FWVRC sent Joseph Burt, Theodore Rigg, Robert Tatlock and Birmingham Quaker, William A. Cadbury, to investigate.

As a result, the first group of FWVRC workers set off on the long journey to Russia in July 1916. The party included two Birmingham Quakers, Florence M. Barrow (1876-1964) and Anne R. Wells (1872-1956).

Florence was the only daughter of businessman and former Mayor, Richard Cadbury Barrow and his wife Jane Harrison. Florence had considerable prior experience of voluntary social work and had worked with Serbian refugees in a clearing station at Frioul, France, earlier in 1916.

Anne was the daughter of John and Elizabeth Wells of Sibford Gower, Oxfordshire. A student at Woodbrooke in 1904-05, she subsequently became a health visitor in Birmingham. Both women remained in Russia during the Revolution of 1917.

Following their arrival in Buzuluk, south-west Russia, they spent several weeks visiting refugees in surrounding villages to assess their needs. Florence emphasised the importance of building a personal relationship with the refugees. She kept a detailed journal in which she described her visits: *'They do appreciate our visits ... for they like to have someone to whom they can tell their troubles. In every house they need clothes & often would have no food but for the kindness of the villagers'*.

Friends ran feeding, clothing and medical programmes; they established occupational workshops for adults, and nurseries and an orphanage for children. This stage of Friends' work in Russia came to a close by the summer of 1919.

Germany – ‘almost more than one could bear’

In July 1919, a group of Friends were the first British civilians to enter defeated Germany. Official permits were issued to Max Bellows, J. Thompson Elliott, Marion Fox and Joan Mary Fry who visited Berlin. An American group, including Friend Carolena Wood, arrived during the same period.

They found great hardship, with food in very limited supply. During the war, the British operated a naval blockade of German ports to restrict food imports to Germany and Austro-Hungary.

This remained in place after the 11 November 1918 Armistice, and its removal was the subject of campaigns by Friends and organisations such as the Fight the Famine Council and Save the Children, which were both established in 1919.

In autumn 1919, a further party of British Quakers visited Germany. It was comprised of Birmingham Friend Edwin Gilbert, Florence Barrow (recently returned from Russia), and the Rugby based, but German born, industrialist Frederick Merttens and his daughter Janie.

They toured towns and cities investigating the conditions in children’s homes and hospitals. Florence visited a children’s hospital in the eastern city of Breslau. In her report back to the FWVRC, she described the doctor showing ‘*us one tiny distorted form after another it was almost more than one could bear.*’

Similarly, Frederick Merttens, describing a visit to a Berlin children’s hospital with Gilbert, wrote: ‘*The little babies were a heart breaking sight [that] forced tears into our eyes, and we turned away too overcome for words.*’

Mindful of the need to raise awareness, and funds to support the work, Gilbert immediately went off to write up the experience for a newspaper.

Feeding Germany

Between 1919 and 1922, relief work in Germany was carried out by the FWVRC and the AFSC. Initially, gifts of food and other necessary items, the Liebesgaben (gifts of love), were sent to Germany to be distributed through German organisations.

From February 1920, American Friends began feeding the children of Germany directly. The scheme was known as the *Quäkerspeisung*. Ruth Fry recorded that at its peak, over a million children a day were being fed in over a thousand towns and cities, and 40,000 Germans helped with the cooking and distributing of food.

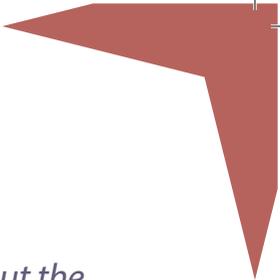
In December 1920, a similar British-funded feeding scheme was established in Cologne under the direction of Paul Sturge, who had assisted with the American efforts. Within weeks, 12,000 children were being fed every day. Both feeding schemes were handed over to German control in early 1922.

Friends were also very concerned about the plight of university students. In May 1920, the first *speisehalle* (food hall) opened in Berlin providing meals for 125 students. This was extended to feed 750. A similar

initiative opened in Leipzig, and by January 1921 most universities and technical schools in Germany were receiving similar assistance.

The Berlin Speisehalle also held social events in the evenings. Evelyn Sharp, a non-Quaker who worked for the FWVRC in Berlin, recalled sitting in the *speisehalle* one evening with a man who had lost an arm in the war and another who had lost a leg, *'discussing how to avoid the next war.'*

Friends' relationship with Germany lasted beyond their work in the First World War. The Quaker International Centre in Berlin remained open until the Second World War, and provided support for those persecuted by the Nazi regime during the 1930s.



Quaker Relief in Austria

In early 1919, British Friends were very concerned about the situation in Austria, particularly the shortage of food in Vienna. In June, the Quaker magazine The Friend published a report by Dr Ethel Williams of Newcastle: 'Though everyone is ill, it is the children and the old people who are suffering the worst. Scarcely any children under four years of age can walk ... There is now no milk for children over a year old: no meat, fish or butter, and very often no sugar'.

In July, Hilda Clark visited Vienna and was horrified by what she found. Her reports resulted in the establishment of a Quaker Mission in the city under her direction. Based in a large former palace at 16 Singerstrasse, the Mission grew rapidly and by November 1920 it included 50-60 British and American relief workers, many of them women.

Initially, the Quaker team concentrated on feeding children, and medical provision. The American Herbert Hoover Initiative was feeding over 100,000 school children in Vienna, but there was great need among children under five, who were not eligible for this scheme.

One of the immediate problems faced by Quaker workers was the lack of milk. This was imaginatively solved by the purchasing of 1,500 cows and bulls, mainly in Holland and Switzerland, which were shipped to Austria and given to farmers in Vienna's agricultural hinterland, together with fodder to ensure the milk yield. This initiative developed into a structured programme of agricultural relief under the leadership of one of the early Quaker relief workers, Helen Andrews.

Vienna - 'a city of the dead'

In November 1919, Francesca Wilson (1889-1981) arrived in Vienna. She described it in her autobiography as 'a city of the dead ... Nothing here but hunger, cold and hopelessness.'

Born into a Quaker family in Newcastle upon Tyne, Francesca studied at Newnham College, Cambridge. After the war, she settled in Birmingham and from 1925 taught history at the Edgbaston Church of England College for Girls.

In Vienna, she was involved in establishing a food depot in Döbling, the first of a network of similar sites throughout the city. Each depot was organised by a member of the Friends' Mission in collaboration with medical staff from the city's Infant Welfare Centres. Mothers were given cards to be exchanged for purchases of clothing and cheap food. In cases of extreme poverty, the Centre doctor could recommend free supplies.

The depots relied on local women and school girl volunteers who packed the goods.

By March 1920, 18 depots had been established at which 18,000 children were receiving a weekly ration of two tins of condensed milk, a quarter pound of sugar and fat or butter, half a pound of oatmeal or semolina, three ounces of cocoa, and a quarter pound of soap. Only one child per family could receive the rations, but additional dried vegetables and rice were distributed to families with more than two children. By January 1921, more than 64,000 children received rations in this way.



▲ School children and depot staff weighing food in Vienna, LSF FEWVRC Pics 1/1/1 © Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

Illness and Industry in Poland

From 1919, the FWVRC was active in Poland, prompted by a desire to help stem a typhus epidemic. The FWVRC worked in collaboration with the AFSC, and by summer 1920 there were 80 workers in the country, most of whom were British Friends.

Like Russia, Poland was a very challenging field of service. The military situation was uncertain, and the local authorities suspected Friends of religious bias and proselytising.

The workers faced a constant battle with the weather and travelling from one outpost to another could take days. Communication with each other, and with the office in London and the AFSC in Philadelphia, was difficult.

Living conditions were poor for the FWVRC workers, and there were reports of serious illness among them. Four are known to have died; Gertrude Powicke, Richard Reynolds Ball and Florence Witherington succumbed to typhus, and Samuel Cole died from pneumonia.

Despite these difficulties, the Poland unit engaged in a wide range of relief work, beginning in the southern city of Zawiercie and gradually expanding to other areas. They disinfected people and their homes against typhus, and opened dispensaries. They provided food and clothing, built houses and schools, supplied horses, co-ordinated ploughing, and distributed agricultural implements, tools and seeds.

They also introduced the Polish Industries Scheme, which ran between 1919 and 1939. It provided a wage for the Polish women who made beautiful embroidered goods, such as tablecloths, which were sent to Britain and America to be sold. By May 1923, some 4,740 Polish women and girls were employed in this way.

Florence Barrow in Poland

Relief work with the FWVRC provided an opportunity for women Friends to exercise leadership and initiative. We have seen, for example, how Hilda Clark took a lead role in the development of work in France and Austria.

Florence Barrow travelled to Poland in January 1920 on behalf of the FWVRC's Poland and Russia subcommittee with Birmingham Quaker William A. Albright, chairman of the FWVRC, and Renshaw Watts. Their purpose was to investigate the housing needs of refugees returning from Russia.

Following their report, a sum of money was approved and Florence was requested to initiate the work in Poland, alongside Quaker Brian Mennell and the Polish relief worker, Jadwiga Bialowiejska. Jadwiga had joined the FWVRC Unit in Poland in 1919 and became head of the orphanage established by Friends at Kolpin, where a Farm School was also established.

In June 1921, Florence became the leader of Quaker relief efforts in Poland and remained there until 1924. Following her return home, she kept in touch with the relief work in Poland for many years, and in 1936 spent a month visiting former refugees with whom she had worked during and after the First World War.



Return to Russia

During the summer of 1921, news reached Britain and America that a severe famine was underway in Russia. War and revolution had been followed by an Allied food blockade, and the harvest had failed for four years in succession.

In 1921, Friends returned to the Buzuluk area, where Quakers had been active during the war. By November that year, a small team was feeding 5,000 children in Buzuluk and a further 3,000 in outlying villages. In December, an American Quaker team arrived and the feeding was extended to 50,000 children and to adults.

At its peak in June 1922, the British Quaker unit was feeding 145,000 children and 112,000 adults of the estimated 30 million people who were affected by the famine. At this point, the British unit comprised of 28 workers, with a further 14 on furlough (or leave) at any one time.

Relief workers in Russia witnessed terrible sights. Evelyn Sharp described the children she and Ruth Fry met in Buzuluk: *'Some looked as if they could not survive: these sat crouched against the wainscoting in corners, with old, dead faces, or stood up against the wall with outstretched arms, like one boy I saw, who looked as if he were being crucified for the apathy of mankind.'*

Relief worker Marjorie Rackstraw, a former resident of Birmingham University's women's hostel, was in charge of a relief post in a village in the Buzuluk area. She described her work there to Francesca Wilson, who quoted Marjorie's account in her autobiography, *In the Margins of Chaos*. Marjorie described having to make agonising decisions about life or death – choosing to feed one child in a family when there wasn't enough food to go around, knowing full well that this meant its siblings would receive nothing. Marjorie summarised the relief workers' dilemma: *'The mothers went down on their knees begging us to allow their children to take it in turns to have the meal provided, but we knew that the ration was so small that all would die. To refuse was heart-breaking but there was no alternative.'*

Publicising the Cause

During and immediately after the First World War, Friends became very adept at the use of publicity to raise both awareness of suffering and funds for its relief. They used the written word, powerful photography, and experimented with new technology – moving film.

Friends did not shy away from graphic depictions of suffering which left little to the imagination. Photographs of the work in Vienna, for example, depicted naked children whose limbs were distorted by rickets, a consequence of malnutrition. The image of children in Russia, shown below, was clearly intended to prompt an emotional response.

Friends were not alone in this, and from 1919 Save the Children used hard-hitting text and images to disseminate its message to the public. Neither was the appeal to the emotions a new technique; Friends and others had a long tradition of using emotive words and imagery, notably in the anti-slavery campaigns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In 1923, the FWWRC commissioned the war correspondent and Polar explorer George Hubert Wilkins to make the film *New Worlds for Old*, depicting scenes of relief work in France, Austria and Russia. The footage from Russia briefly showed a large heap of naked frozen corpses awaiting burial, together with Russians preparing meals from grass.



Interwar Legacies

In the interwar period, Quakers continued to respond to humanitarian needs in places of conflict.

In 1919, the FWVRC merged with the Friends' Emergency Committee, which assisted 'enemy aliens' on the 'home front'. Together they formed the Friends' Emergency and War Victims' Relief Committee. This in turn was superseded by the Friends' Service Council (FSC) in 1928.

In 1936, American Quakers, Alfred and Norma Jacob, responded to the internal displacement of women and children in Spain during the Civil War by introducing feeding centres in Barcelona.

The Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting raised considerable amounts of money to support the Jacobs' work. It also funded two educational colonies for displaced children, one at Caldas de Malavella, near Gerona, and 'Colonia Birmingham' at Rubí, near Barcelona.

In 1936, Francesca Wilson (see p.15) was the first Quaker relief worker to arrive in Southern Spain. From her base at Murcia, she organised feeding centres, a hospital and educational

colonies for children, and training workshops for refugee women. She was joined in Murcia by AFSC workers, including Esther Farquhar and Emily Parker, who continued the work.

When the Spanish Republic fell to Franco in 1939, Francesca was one of several Quaker workers who followed thousands of Spanish refugees over the border into France, where the relief work continued.



**FEEDING
SPAIN'S CHILDREN**



▲ Fundraising pamphlet, 1938, LSF FSC Box 3/86 © Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

Another World War

Events in Germany prompted the formation of a new Germany Emergency Committee (GEC) in 1933, which supported refugees and the persecuted. The FWWRC was revived in 1940, and renamed the Friends' Relief Service (FRS) in 1941.

Until 1944, the FRS concentrated on relief work in the UK, providing support in air raid and rest shelters, and establishing evacuation hostels to remove children, and some mothers, from areas at risk of bombing.

The Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting and the FRS supported an evacuation home in Barnt Green, Worcestershire. Opened in a house provided by the Quaker Gibbins family, the home provided accommodation for children under five years old from the inner city areas of Birmingham and Coventry.

In 1944, the FRS began its work in Europe, wearing the Quaker star and a uniform of Quaker grey instead of military khaki. In April 1945, a Quaker, Lilian Impey, led a team into the recently-liberated concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen in Germany, where they tried to improve the condition of the survivors.

The same year saw FRS teams working in camps for displaced people (DPs) in Germany. Margaret McNeill (1909-1985) worked in DP camps between 1945 and 1948, and with the FRS in Brunswick, from 1949 to 1952. On her return to Britain, she joined the staff of Woodbrooke College in Birmingham, before returning home to Northern Ireland in 1971, where she, again, worked for peace.

In 1950, Margaret published a semi-fictional account of her relief work, *By the Rivers of Babylon: A story of relief work among the Displaced Persons of Europe*. She aimed to convince her readers of their shared humanity with displaced people, or as the dust jacket of the book referred to them: '*... unhappy exiles ... no whit different from human beings in Tooting and Sunderland, Balham and Buxton, save that they happen to have been unfortunate enough to be born Poles, Ukrainians, or Balts, and to have been bereft of home and country.*'

An 'appeal to the hearts of Friends'

In 1947, British and American Friends were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their peace work and for their services to humanity, including their aid activities during both the First and the Second World Wars.

Henry J. Cadbury of the AFSC, and Margaret Backhouse (1887-1977), chair of the British Friends Service Council, travelled to Oslo to accept the award on behalf of Quakers.

Margaret had spent a considerable part of her life in Birmingham. Although born into a wealthy Quaker banking family in Darlington, she was one of the first students at Westhill Training College for Sunday School workers in Selly Oak in 1907, and returned there as a member of staff between 1915 and 1939.

In her Nobel acceptance address, Margaret strove to provide her audience with an understanding of the basic principles and history that underpinned Friends' humanitarian endeavours; it is a legacy which continues today in many parts of the world.

'Upon this basic truth all the principles and actions of the Society of Friends are founded. Each man is seen as having intrinsic value, and Christ is equally concerned for the other man as for me. We all become part of the divine family, and as such we are all responsible for one another, carrying our share of the shame when wrong is done and of the burden of suffering. In this way a brotherhood is founded which renders impossible a lack of regard for others and, as in a family circle it is the weakest or the most in need that calls out the greatest desire to help, so the forgotten and suffering people of the world appeal to the hearts of Friends.'

Quakers & the First World War

LIVES & LEGACIES

A copy of a similar film showing scenes from AFSC relief work in France and Austria can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwxy25oCBtg>.

Further Reading

-Backhouse, M. A., *The International Service of the Society of Friends* (1949)

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

-Fry, A. R., *A Quaker Adventure: The Story of Nine Years Relief and Reconstruction* (1926)

-Greenwood, J. O., *Quaker Encounters Volume 1: Friends and Relief* (1975)

-Scott, R., *Quakers in Russia* (1964)

-Storr, K., *Excluded from the Record: Women, Refugees and Relief 1914-1929* (2010)

-Wilson, F.M., *In the Margins of Chaos: Recollections of Relief Work in and Between Three Wars* (1944)

For an overview of refugee movements during the war by Peter Gatrell see <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/refugees-europe-on-the-move>

For an overview of Quaker relief and service see <http://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/326/-Institutions-of-Relief-and-Service>

For an introduction to the AFSC by Jack Sutters see <https://www.afsc.org/story/origin-american-friends-service-committee>

This booklet draws on research in the archives of the FWWRC, the FSC, and the papers of Florence Barrow (Temp MSS 590) all at the Library of the Religious Society of Friends, London.

The Friend is a valuable source for all aspects of Quaker activities in this period. Copies are held at The Library of the Religious Society of Friends in London and Woodbrooke Quaker Studies Centre in Birmingham.

The film *New Worlds for Old* is available on video and copies are held at The Library of the Religious Society of Friends and Woodbrooke Quaker Studies Centre.

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