

Library of the Society of Friends Newsletter



Issue 03

Spring/Summer 2009

Welcome to the twice yearly Newsletter produced by the Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Britain Yearly Meeting. This edition announces the new Library exhibition on Quakers and Science, inspired by the 150th Anniversary of Charles Darwin's *On the origin of species*. It reports a celebratory tea party marking the completion of the pre-1801 printed material cataloguing project and the launch of the next phase – the printed Peace Project. An unusual item from the museum objects collection with an intriguing history is unveiled, and a 17th century Quaker woman's books are discussed. Also in this issue - a unique resource for local and family historians and the results of the readers' survey. BeFriend a Book and preservation news describes the continuing improvements in the preservation of the collections and recent conservation treatment of three manuscript volumes.

New Library exhibition

*"The World is certainly a great and stately
Volume of natural Things ..."*

William Penn *Some fruits of solitude* (1693)

The new Library exhibition, to open on 26th May, will be on Quakers and Science. Inspired by the 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the origin of species*, the exhibition will concentrate primarily on the contribution of Friends to the understanding of the natural world. Early Quakers saw the physical universe not

only as God's creation but as being infused with religious meaning, As early as 1680 Quaker schoolmaster and botanist Thomas Lawson (1630-1691), in his *A mite into the treasury*,

recommended that Quaker children should be taught to "read the Nature, Use and Service of Trees, Birds, Beast, Fish, Serpents, Insects, Earths, Metals, Salts, Stones Vulgar and Precious ..." Quakers have also made a contribution to the study of the skies, both in astronomy and meteorology. The contribution of Luke Howard (1772-1864) to the classification of clouds and the role of astrophysicist Arthur Eddington (1882-1944) in

confirming Einstein's Theory of Relativity have recently been commemorated by television programmes – the Library holds works by both of them. Astronomy seems to have attracted Quaker women – from Elizabeth Brown (1830-1899) to Jocelyn Bell Burnell [b.1943].

The Library also holds reports from the natural history societies set up in the 19th century in Quaker schools. The picture shows how Friends continued to follow Thomas Lawson's advice.



Penketh Natural History Society, 1898
(Pic. Vol. 4)

Cataloguing of peace materials begins



EDITH M. ELLIS
(Acting Hon. Sec. of the
Friends' Service Committee)

The Library has embarked on a new phase of its Retrospective Cataloguing Project – an 18 month-long project to ensure the printed peace collection is fully catalogued and available on the [on-line catalogue](#).

The peace testimony is one of the most fundamental of Quaker practices, and the Library's collection of peace related materials reflects its importance. Thanks to grants from the Aurelius Trust, Brian Lancaster Trust, Edith M. Ellis Charitable Trust, [Sir James Reckitt Charity](#), [Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust](#) and the C.B. and H.H. Taylor Trust, access to this important collection will be enhanced.

The support of the Edith M. Ellis Charitable Trust is particularly appropriate, in the light of Edith M. Ellis's life. Edith Maud Ellis (1878-1963) and her sister Marian Emily Ellis (1878-1952) were identical twins.

Edith M. Ellis was brought up in an atmosphere of sympathy with the suffering and oppressed. Public service was important in the family: her great-uncle, James Ellis (1841-1910) had undertaken work during the Irish potato famine and her father, John Edward Ellis (1829-1901), was a Liberal M.P. During the Boer War the family's London home was a receiving depot for clothing and aid for the women's camps in South Africa.

It is no surprise then that Edith M. Ellis was an active peace worker, becoming in 1915 treasurer of the Friends Service Committee set up to advise Quaker men of enlistment age. In Spring 1918 the officers of the Friends Service Committee were brought to trial at the Guildhall in London for publishing the pamphlet *A challenge to militarism* without first submitting it to the government censor, in contravention of Regulation 27c of the Defence of the Realm Act. Edith was imprisoned for 3 months. She continued to work for peace and justice for the rest of her life.

A surprise in store

Quakers have traditionally had strong links with the temperance movement. The Library holds the archives of the former Friends Temperance Union, and its successor body, Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs, which is still very active. Although most Friends are no longer strictly teetotal, Friends House itself remains alcohol-free. It therefore comes as something of a surprise that the Library holds in store a bottle of decidedly vintage port. When it was presented in 1898 by Friend John Brown of Wisbech, it had already been in the donor's family for a century. Housed in a specially built wooden case, its cork sealed by wax, an inscription tells the whole story:

'This bottle of Port Wine was given by John Gurney Bevan to John Brown, John King and John Brown, junr., when imprisoned in the Fleet in London in the year 1797, under an Exchequer process for the non-payment of Tithes at Haddenham, and at the request of John Brown (then junr.) is not to be opened until the Church of England is severed from the State by Legislature.'



The Church of England is no longer entitled to demand compulsory tithes – defiance of which led to many Friends suffering imprisonment and confiscation of property. However, it remains an established church – so naturally the bottle has never been opened. What the port might taste like after more than 200 years nobody knows, but if ever the Church of England is disestablished we may find out.

Tea to celebrate completion of pre-1801 cataloguing project

On 23rd February the reading room was filled with guests invited to a celebratory tea to mark the completion of the retrospective cataloguing of the Library's pre-1801 books and pamphlets. Guests enjoyed short addresses from Moira Goff of the British Library's English Short Title Catalogue office, David J. Hall of the Project Steering Group and Juliet Prager on behalf of the trustees of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

A 17th century Quaker woman's library

Now that the re-cataloguing of the Library's collections of [pre-1801 books](#) and pamphlets is complete, it is much easier to find out about 17th and 18th

century Quaker publishing. But what do we know about the readership of these works?

Although most of the Library's books and pamphlets were collected at the time of printing and housed in

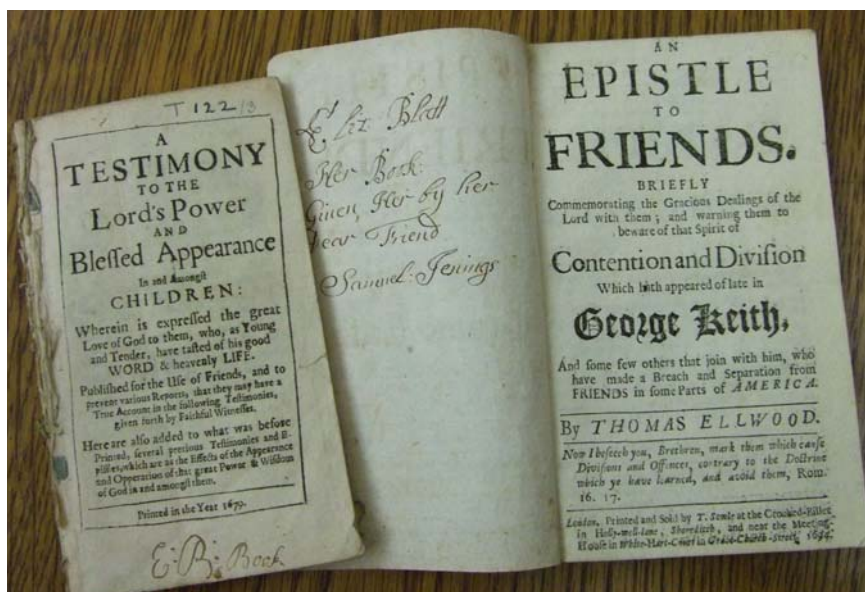
"The Chamber" many have come from private collections of individual Friends. The retrospective cataloguing project offered the opportunity to begin systematically recording provenance information about these items, such as bookplates, inscriptions and manuscript notes on title pages and endpapers. This has shed some intriguing light on individual owners of Quaker books.

A Friend whose name does not appear in the pages of history books is Elizabeth Blatt of Reigate. Evidence of her ownership appears on 13 printed items in the Library's collection, published in the years between 1669 and

1703. All pamphlets or slim volumes, they include controversial works, accounts of sufferings, and advice to young people. Interestingly some of the pamphlets have clearly passed together into another's hands. Two of them bear the ownership inscription of Richard Chester 1772 (the Library holds 7 Richard Chester books marked with that year and 2 other books of his from the same decade).

The Blatts were a Reigate family of artisans and tradesmen – tallow chandlers, tanners and mercers. Evidence from Joseph Besse's *Collection of the sufferings of the people called Quakers*, 1753, gives some impression of their economic status (the value of goods confiscated from members of the family for their beliefs in the years up to 1689 was considerable – £42 10s in 1670, £20 in 1683, £23 2s from 1686 to 1690). Local deeds in Surrey History Centre show the Blatt family, including Elizabeth, involved in transfer of property. The Library's *Digest registers* detail their births, marriages and burials. But only her

signature on the flyleaves of these books provides evidence of what an ordinary Quaker woman like Elizabeth Blatt might have owned and read, for inspiration or comfort at the turn of the 17th century.



Running the meeting's library

The Library will be providing a short course for Quaker meeting librarians at [Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre](#) this autumn (4-6 September 2009). Aimed at all those involved in running the meeting library, it will look at different aspects of the work, in talks, practical sessions and small group work. For more information and booking, contact Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ, Tel. 0121 472 5171).

Unique resource for tracing local Quakers

The Library holds sets of printed members' lists produced by quarterly/general meetings and monthly meetings dating back a century and in some cases to the 1870s. Last year they were added to the Library's [online catalogue](#). Readers are permitted to consult lists over 50 years old (for data protection reasons, more recent members' lists remain closed except to members of that Quarterly or Monthly Meeting). These prove to be very useful for family historians and readers researching individuals and meeting histories.

Feedback on the user survey

The survey received 151 replies from Library users, of whom 43% were Friends and 25% overseas readers. It showed very high ratings for the help given to readers by Library staff and for the remote enquiry service. Comments about the recent increase in Library opening hours were particularly positive. As a result of the survey we will review our copying prices and seek improvements to the microfilm reading facilities. Thanks to everyone who took the time to complete the questionnaire.

BeFriend a Book and preservation news

In 2006 the Library benefited from a Preservation Audit Visit funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Visiting conservators presented a detailed report on the condition of collections, storage and environmental conditions, helping to inform the Library's current preservation plan. One of the key recommendations concerned the packaging of parts of the manuscript collection, in worn old boxes, constructed from acidic card with staples, unsuitable for historical material. With a box budget and a willing volunteer, the Library has begun a programme of re-boxing to ensure the long-term preservation of these manuscripts. Archive-friendly, acid-free boxes and folders are being used and the volunteer has been hard at work flattening pages of manuscripts and removing paperclips.

Thanks to the Befriend a Book fund, the third volume of Sarah Lindsey's American Memorandums (MS Vol S233), 28 April 1859

to 14 April 1860, has been conserved. Sarah (Crosland) Lindsey (1804-1876) of Bolton was the wife of Robert Lindsey (1801-1863) of Leeds, a travelling minister. These volumes of journal letters home provide an account of the couple's religious visit to remote parts of North America, Sandwich Islands, Australia and Tasmania in 1857.

Two volumes of peace related material from the manuscript collection have also received conservation treatment. The report of the All Friends Conference held in London, 1920 (MS Vol. 51) records the proceedings of an international gathering of Friends concerned with the post-war situation and the Quaker peace testimony.



American delegates at the All Friends Conference, 1920 (F.50)

The minute book of Margate Auxiliary Peace Society for 1844-1849 (MS Vol. S49) has been conserved: the Society was established in Margate in 1844 on the model of the London Peace Society to "diffuse information showing that war is inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity and the true interests of mankind". The Library holds a second volume of minutes, with annual reports for 1858-1859.

If you would like to donate to the [BeFriend a Book appeal](#), please contact BeFriend a Book (Library), Freepost, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Contact us

We welcome feedback about this newsletter and the Library's services. If you would prefer not to receive the newsletter, please let us know at the below address or email your name and 'Unsubscribe' to libnews@quaker.org.uk.

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