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Guest Introduction

Quaker Business, Industry and Commerce: New Critical Perspectives and Pathways

This themed edition of *Quaker Studies* assembles a collection of papers by Quaker and other scholars from the fields of management and organisation to examine Quakerism in business, industry and commerce. These papers arise out of the joint Quaker Studies Research Association/Centre for Research in Quaker Studies conference held at Woodbrooke on 21 June 2018. The themes explored in them cover a wide, and previously under-explored, terrain that encompasses both a retrospective look at the influence and impact of Quaker-owned businesses and practices on society and vice versa and the often uneasy relationship between contemporary management theory and practice and Quaker tradition. Furthermore, the papers I have selected for this themed issue either adopt a critical perspective or elaborate new and interesting ways to understand the interface between Quakerism and business, with the ambition to open new pathways for future research. In other words, it has been the intention both to break new ground in *Quaker Studies* and to excite and interest management scholars to (re)turn to Quaker practice as a means to interpret contemporary phenomena.

Quakers have a long—and sometimes uneasy—tradition in business, industry and commerce. The history of the Quaker chocolatiers has been widely documented in management history scholarship (e.g. Jones 1984; Fitzgerald 1989; Prior and Kirby 1993; Rowlinson 1988; 1995). However, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century Quaker firms were arguably an important facet in the broader rise of industrial capitalism (King 2014). Though small in number, Quakers had a significant impact and produced a remarkable and dispropor-tionate number of businesspeople, scientists, thinkers and campaigners for justice, peace and human rights (Furtado 2013; Raistrick 1951). The breadth and depth of Quaker involvement in business, industry and commerce is quite astonishing given the relatively small membership. Despite this lack of numbers, Quakers populated industries as diverse as chocolate, iron and lead production, banking,

life assurance, biscuits, shoes, pharmaceuticals, soap, chemicals, railways and canals, to name but a few.

The literature exploring the connection between Quakers, business, industry and commerce has developed in four distinctive themes. First, there is a substantial literature that explores the factors and antecedents that contributed to Quaker involvement and (on the whole) success in business, industry and commerce. For example, often-cited sources include retrospective analyses of Quaker businesses by Paul Emden (1940), Arthur Raistrick (1951), David Windsor (1980) and James Walvin (1997). More recent contributions to the literature include an articulation of ethical capitalism by Mike King (2014) and edited volumes by Stephen Angell and Pink Dandelion (2017) and Nicholas Burton and Richard Turnbull (2019) that assemble chapters on Quakerism and business. Chapters can also be found in important Quaker volumes, such as *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Dandelion and Angell 2013). On the whole, these varied contributions adopt a retrospective view to understand the practices of Quaker business, but often such retrospective analyses have been criticised for insufficient attention to historical, social, economic and political contexts (e.g. Rowlinson and Hassard 1993).

A second stream of the literature encompasses a wide range of biographies of Quaker business figures or families and corporate histories. Examples include biographies of Joseph Rowntree (Titley 2013; Vernon 2013), George Cadbury (Bennett 2005) and Joseph Wharton (Yates 1987), to name a few. Similarly, the genre of the corporate history has spanned a number of Quaker firms, such as Overend & Gurney (Elliot 2006), Huntley & Palmer (Corley 1972), Allen & Hanbury (Tweedale 1990), Clarks (Palmer 2013), Friends Provident (Tregoning and Cockerell 1982) and Crosfields (Musson 1965).

A third, but smaller, stream of research has adopted a somewhat critical perspective. Perhaps one of the most critical scholars in management history is Michael Rowlinson, who published a series of papers (one with John Hassard) in the 1980s and 1990s on Cadbury (the firm on which his PhD focussed), arguing that Cadbury had an 'invented corporate culture' and that the use of scientific management was hardly consistent with Quakerism (Rowlinson 1988; 1995; Rowlinson and Hassard 1993). Wagner-Tsukamoto (2008), publishing in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, also adopted a critical perspective, describing Quaker ethics as only partly successful and in some respects a failure, as Quaker ethics took precedent over institutional ethics and economics, leading to Quaker businesses absorbing costs that the market could not support. In an article in *Economic History Review* Esther Sahle (2018) examined the archives of London Quakers and found scant evidence of formal contract enforcement by Quakers until after 1750, and thus oversight and contract enforcement by Meeting cannot explain Quaker success in the Atlantic trade during this period. Furthermore, rather than noting reasons for success, a number of authors have considered the reasons why Quaker businesses shifted away from Quaker ownership and control after incorporation in the late nineteenth century (e.g. Burton and Hope 2018;

Kavanagh and Brigham 2019). Nicola Sleapwood elaborates further on this theme in this issue.

A fourth stream of literature has endeavoured to relocate Quaker business and management practice within contemporary debates. For example, Read (2019) offers insight into how Quakerism is experienced at work in contemporary contexts. Muers and Burton (2018) situate the Quaker business method within contemporary debates about 'good' decision-making, a topic which Peter Cheng further elaborates in this themed issue. Burton, Koning and Muers (2018) highlight the methodological issues of insider research on Quakers by Quakers and propose that organisational ethnography may provide one way forward. Finally, Burton and Hope (2018) argue that contemporary initiatives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and B-Corporation accreditation speak to Quaker concerns about the need for a new economy.

There is undoubtedly something intriguing about the Quaker story that has attracted historians and Quaker scholars over the last fifty years. *Quaker Studies* itself has also featured a number of papers that can be located within the broad discipline of 'Quakers and business', such as Roberts' (2003) paper summarising the scope of Quaker businesses, as well as explorations of topics such as the governance at Scott Bader Commonwealth (Pinder 2011), Cadburys' construction of Bourneville (Bailey and Bryson 2007) and Rowntrees' approach to corporate philanthropy (Davies and Freeman 2005; Freeman 2003). And yet the connection between Quakerism and business has rarely attracted the sustained attention of management scholars or the management history divisions of US or UK management academies. Kavanagh and Brigham (2019) hypothesise that this may be because, at precisely the time that 'management' was gaining traction as a serious discipline, Quaker ownership and control of firms was diminishing. Others may simply not take management and religion seriously (Tracey 2012). However, given the ever-increasing number of corporate scandals and a resulting turn to responsible management and corporate social responsibility as subjects of importance in management journals, this themed issue is especially timely.

The issue begins with Nicola Sleapwood's paper exploring why Quaker manufacturing businesses shifted out of Quaker family ownership. Sleapwood analyses the effect of World War I on Quaker businesses through the lens of one Quaker firm—Albright and Wilson, a chemical manufacturing firm—highlighting not only that World War I (and the resulting government control of the firm) introduced significant commercial challenges, particularly in international markets, but also that it added a significant complexity to the Quaker commitment to pacifism. Ethical dilemmas sit at the heart of Sleapwood's narrative. For instance, government control of the firm during the war decimated the business, which made accepting contracts for military work after the war commercially attractive. Sleapwood charts the departure of key Quaker figures owing to their pacifist principles and the increase in non-Quaker board members

willing to accept such contracts, which, Sleapwood argues, represented a significant influence in the business's ceasing to be distinctively Quaker. The kinds of ethical dilemma and crisis of consciousness associated with World War I did not affect only the Quaker influence at Albright and Wilson; Sleapwood notes how similar patterns of reshaped ownership were also seen at other Quaker firms, such as Cadbury's and Clarks.

The second paper in this issue, by Andrew Fincham, investigates the philanthropic activities of George Cadbury and asks 'what, if anything, was distinctly Quaker about George Cadbury's philanthropic activities?' Fincham locates his analysis within an evaluation of Industrial Betterment, and finds close alignment between the settlements at Bournville and those created by industrialists who were not members of the Religious Society of Friends. Thus, at first glance Fincham finds that Cadbury's philanthropic actions were not unique. Nonetheless, Fincham contrasts the motivations of Cadbury with those of other industrial pioneers to argue that Cadbury's actions were distinct motivationally, placing Cadbury's philanthropy within the distinctly Quaker tradition of building God's Kingdom on earth. To understand the Cadbury contribution to industrial betterment, Fincham argues that an understanding of faith rather than deed is needed.

Given that the 2018 Quaker Studies Research Association/Centre for Research in Quaker Studies conference was held at Woodbrooke on the centenary of the inaugural Quakers Employers Conference in 1918 (also held at Woodbrooke), it is fitting that our third paper by John Kimberley analyses the transcript of the 1918 Conference through the lens of the Cadbury chocolate business. Kimberley focuses on the extent to which Cadbury, and the other Quaker employers present, were prepared to listen to the 'Voice of Labour' when introducing labour reforms in the early twentieth century. Kimberley's analysis suggests that Quaker employers, and the Cadbury company in particular, were early examples of a pluralist approach to employee relations that encouraged practices such as collective bargaining and trade union representation, as well as experimenting with modernist forms of industrial practice, such as a more co-operative and participative approach to employee relations. Kimberley argues that the transcript of the Conference illustrates that Quaker employers were willing to listen, as well as to question the extent to which labour was best represented in Quaker companies.

The fourth paper, by Stephen Allen, is located within contemporary leadership and sustainability debates and develops a perspective of 'relational leadership' within Quaker ways of non-hierarchal organising. As Allen notes, relational leadership is connected to equitable ways of organising. His paper connects three aspects of relational leadership—mutual influence process, momentary and socially co-constructed—to Quaker organising through interviews with twenty Quakers in the north of England. Allen finds that equality is understood to be integral to Quaker ways of organising, although problems of status and power do not entirely disappear. Allen notes complex tensions that exist between attaching

a 'weight' of influence to certain people and respecting the ability of some people to be particularly insightful. In addition, relational patterns can become static, despite the rotation of roles, within communities of Quakers. Thus, Allen finds that the 'potential to be momentary' and to break out of existing, and often unacknowledged, boundaries deserves further attention in Quaker management practice.

Peter Cheng, in the fifth paper, follows a similar line of enquiry and offers a contemporary perspective on Quaker ways of organising and deciding. Building upon recent scholarly work on the Quaker Business Method (QBM), the paper analyses the quality of its component processes and the potential morality of its decisions. Cheng's framework is located within models from cognitive science to argue that QBM may improve access to relevant information, mitigate biases, aid problem-solving and counter negative social influences. Notwithstanding the potential benefits of utilising QBM as a decision-making process in non-Quaker contexts, Cheng also highlights some limitations and risks that could undermine its efficacy. Chengs' use of cognitive science models brings interesting new insights to the operation and shared understandings of QBM that do not rely upon theological explanations.

The sixth paper, by Penelope Cummins, examines governance and decision-making within the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the context of the 1993/2006 Charities Acts. Provocatively, Cummins argues that Quaker governance and decision-making has been flipped into a formal hierarchy, and Yearly Meeting attendees act as mere audience. Cummins thus adopts a critical orientation towards the introduction of a group of managing trustees as a decision-making body, and locates these structural changes to the broader secularisation of religious groups in response to the demands of the state. Cummins asks whether such secularisation pressures emanating from these changes have fundamentally changed the religious character of British Quakerism, and argues that the structural changes have shifted decision-making away from Yearly Meeting, such that the Quaker character of organising has been diminished. Furthermore, Cummins argues that the fiduciary separation associated with different charitable bodies and separate trading companies has the potential to decouple decision-making further, rather than encourage cooperation.

The final paper, by David Lingelbach, considers how Quaker management practice may make a contribution to contemporary management education. Lingelbach notes that while spiritual practices have appeared on business school curriculums, Quaker educational practices have not yet had a meaningful influence. Lingelbach articulates a vision of a contemporary Quaker management education that teaches Quaker business practices in a Quaker way and encompasses honesty, networking, conservative financial practice and philanthropy, as well as attributes of Quaker management practice such as the Quaker business method. Lingelbach criticises the financial or shareholder lens through which much management education is considered, and proposes that a Quaker curriculum

could encompass the Quaker testimonies as alternative lenses through which contemporary business problems could be explored.

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