

Preface

We all have a tendency to let war set the agenda, and to determine our timeframes. Simply to write “1914-1918” is to define a time period with reference to war. It is, however, a distinctive and influential period in the history of war resistance. This volume chronicles war resistance in this era, including the remarkable witness and sacrifice of conscientious objectors.

When it comes to writing history, much depends on one’s perception and perspective. Some pro-war critiques argue that life is cheap and that a casualty list of millions was a small price to pay for whatever it was that the war was meant to achieve.¹ Even the approach of the seemingly most “dispassionate” historians is coloured by their own personal perspective.² This volume has been produced with the intention of writing peace history from the perspective of contemporary opponents of war, using their words and their own, vindicated analyses. There may be a handful of stories here that are familiar, but they have previously been told by those seeking to denigrate or at least downplay the achievements of the war resisters. Original sources, however, can lend themselves to alternative interpretations. The people and events narrated may be seen in a new light when viewed from the unexpected perspective of peace history.

There are also many new stories, narratives and traditions that have either never been previously revealed, or that have never been seen in the context of an informed tradition of peace history. They have certainly never been collected together before. This volume tells these unknown stories, of peace groups campaigning against the 1914-1918 war, of individual conscientious objectors to military service, of preachers and politicians, workers and women who refused to succumb to the clamour of a society at war. In fact, there are so many stories, especially from Nonconformist and Dissenting quarters, that it has been necessary to focus not only on Christian experience, but also on the most unlikely strand within it; namely the anti-war tradition

within the Established Church. We see the typical experience of many war resisters. We also sense the impact on the religious and political establishment as opposition to war moves from chapel to church, from street to state.

By way of introduction I undertake a "Cook's Tour" of key movements in western peace history, leading to a consideration of a changing peace movement that attempted to engage with the complex interplay of Empire and internationalism in the Edwardian era.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, the peace movement was completely reformed. The story of the founding of the Christian wing, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, is explored and the stories of some of the key players in it, not least Maude Royden, one of the most influential women opponents of the war. I consider a number of prominent individuals within the peace movement, including the extraordinary witness of George Lansbury, various clergy and opponents of war in the United States, India and the British Empire. The experiences of conscientious objectors, including those who heard the death sentence read out to them, are also examined; what were their stories, what was the impact of their witness on society, the state, the church? Where exactly *was* the Established Church in this opposition to war? Not at the centre, that much is clear. From the unique perspective of peace history, it appears that the religious establishment is frequently peripheral.

Finally, the lasting impact of the pacifists of 1914-1918 is explored. Their legacy continued in a peace movement that was renewed and re-shaped once again after the war. In a post-war society struggling to make sense of the slaughter of the First World War, the Church of England and other churches were forced to come to terms with pacifist insights by a remarkable international Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship in 1923. The stand of the conscientious objectors especially came to be seen by many in post-war society as a prophetic critique of the consequences of war. Given half a chance, they might even have prevented the next one, but that was not to be.

The cost of the First World War remains evident in every community; everywhere there are memorials, often disguising slaughter as sacrifice, disingenuously reinterpreting gore and waste as glory, and celebrating the false god of patriotism. A century on, the events of 1914-1918 are still being retold and re-evaluated. That process needs to go beyond recounting the "victories", stalemates and defeats of Gallipoli, the Somme, Passchendaele et al. It must even go beyond the study of poet-soldiers, with their remonstrations in rhyme but not renunciation. It needs to include the stories of those who said "No", the stories of real resistance, of the thousands who not only rejected the official reasons for being at war, but who refused to contribute to the war effort and voluntarily carried their objection to the point where their own lives

were jeopardised. Histories of the war are essential, but insufficient without engagement with the history of the war resisters. Only their stories have the power to inform our consciences, to warn us of the consequences of future war and to inspire us to work for peace in the twenty-first century.

This volume brings together the investigations, detective work, and information-gathering of twenty years. My thanks go to those, too many to identify, who have helped me along the way. Particular thanks go to Philip Dransfield, who supported this venture from the outset; to Cyril Pearce, who generously allowed me preliminary access to his remarkable database of conscientious objectors; to colleagues at the Peace Museum in Bradford, and especially to friends in the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, www.anglicanpeacemaker.org.uk, whose practical support has brought this volume to fruition. This account reveals the underlying heritage behind their continuing witness.

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