



Quakers in Scotland

Briefing member's business debate on 5th December 2018: Conscientious objectors memorial in Princes St Gardens.

There are 37 war memorials in Edinburgh, Quakers in Scotland welcome this debate and hope it is now time for peacemakers' to be recognised in the public spaces of Scotland. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) have a long history of conscientious objection, being led by faith to believe that all people, even those we fundamentally disagree with, carry something of the sacred within them. In 1660, George Fox, wrote to King Charles II

“All bloody principles and practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world”.

Later we worked to gain an amendment to the Military Service Act 1916, which meant Britain became the first country in the world to recognise Conscientious Objection as a right. This paved the way for the right not to kill to become an internationally recognised human right.

During world war one many Quakers, along with socialists and other philosophical, moral, or religious groups, were conscientious objectors. While some COs expressed their objection by working for organisations such as the Friends Ambulance Unit, many objectors were sent to prison, where they were treated harshly, with poor living conditions and enforced labor. Walter Roberts laboring in Dyce Quarry in Aberdeen became the first CO to die while imprisoned. The planned memorial will incorporate stone from the quarry.

Once the war was over many of these men found themselves denied jobs and shunned by their communities, causing further pain to themselves and their families. The stories of these men are part of Scotland's hidden unacknowledged history. Yet many well-known Scottish names are among those who chose not to kill, former Secretary of State for Scotland, Arthur Woodburn and poets Edwin Morgan and Norman McCaig.

Quakers remember these men and their experiences, because of our sincere conviction that all people have that of God within them. We hope this memorial will remind others of this shrouded past. We believe Scotland is in a unique position to demonstrate good practice in human rights and peace building. We hope our parliamentarians will support the proposed memorial to these men who set a great example for us to work towards in cherishing as precious the life of all the peoples who throughout time have found their way here – and to remind us that peace building work is still needed desperately around the world.

“Contentious objection is not a total repudiation of force; it is a refusal to surrender moral responsibility for ones actions.”

Kenneth C Barnes, Quaker Faith and Practice 24.25