

## The 2009 History of Breckenbrough School

**Quaker influence in an educational experiment – by Rob Knox (2010)** 69 pages  
£5 including p&p from Breckenbrough School, Sandhutton, Nr Thirsk YO7 4EN 01845 587238

Review by Joyce Pickard, Friargate Local Meeting, York Area Meeting

**Breckenbrough School** is a Quaker School, but with a difference. How many Friends who criticise the more familiar Quaker schools as 'selective, privileged, fee-paying' have paused to consider the example of this small, North Yorkshire school, first founded in 1934 in Dunnaw Hall, on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border? It is managed by a Governing Body of Friends appointed by 'Quakers in Yorkshire' and its Quaker ethos dates back to its earliest days.

This new book, written by the Deputy Head of the school, Rob Knox (an Ackworth Old Scholar) tells the story, and in the words of the Chairman of Governors, Nicholas Evens (of Harrogate Local Meeting)

'The story reminds us of the school's first inspiring leader, Arthur Fitch, and goes on to record the contributions of his successors and their staffs, touching lightly on difficulties and disappointments, and rightly celebrating their efforts and achievements. The school has been fortunate in finding the right people when needed.'

The original plan was to help young people who 'struggled to cope with the pressures of society and education.' Today, technically a 'non-maintained special school', it caters for boys of above average ability, but 'statemented' by their local education authority as needing more help than can be offered by their local school. All fees are paid by the sponsoring authority, and owing to the essential high staff-student ratio, the costs are considerably greater than the fees of 'normal' Quaker schools. But the pupils are indeed privileged to have been selected for such a caring and special education, from which many emerge as capable and positive individuals, going on into a variety of work including industry, the professions, and setting up their own businesses.

The school had its first OFSTED inspection in 1996, during the headship of Trevor Bennett. Fortunately 'the inspectors saw the school's potential, and were very interested in the idea of conflict resolution. They had to check with head office to see if they could use the term, because it was not part of the official OFSTED language'! At the next visit 'a number of lessons were rated as 'outstanding', but the inspectors also commented on the high quality and quantity of school food and were also impressed by the excellence and variety of outdoor education.

The whole ethos of Breckenbrough is based on the search to develop 'that of God' in each individual – to help them to be honest about themselves, to take responsibility for their own behaviour, and, with skilled adult support, to map out their own constructive solutions to problems that arise. A recent OFSTED report commented on 'the excellent relationships between pupils and adults' and observed that 'pupils make astounding improvements in their attitude and behaviour.'

This new History, enhanced by many photographs, is a remarkable story of success with young people, many diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), who had been let down and damaged by 'ordinary schools' before being offered, and personally choosing to accept, a place at Breckenbrough School. It will be of interest to anyone who works in education, who knows young people who are finding difficulties in mainstream education or wants to know more about how conflict resolution can work.