

Testimony to the Grace of God in the Lives of Jack and Ruth Dobbs

Jack was born on 22nd July, 1922 in Newport Berkeley, Gloucestershire. His father abandoned the family when Jack was very young and his mother supported the family by working in the Post Office. Jack won a place at Dursley Grammar School and began to expand his musical talent by becoming organist at the United Reformed Church's Dursley Tabernacle and winning a hymn-writing competition judged by Vaughan Williams.

After obtaining a first class degree in music from the University College of Wales, he obtained a Master's degree in Education from Durham University. There he became a Music Lecturer in the Education Department, taught at schools in the area and subsequently became an inspiring County Music Adviser. He was in a working class community, in the Durham coalfields, and developed a particular interest in music for slow learning children. It was at Durham, through Quaker Meetings and the University Choral Society, which Jack conducted, that Jack met Ruth Astrid Heaton.

Born on July 25th 1934, Ruth was an Anglo-Swede. She cherished her Scandinavian ancestry and liked to remind people of her middle name. Her parents were missionaries in India until 1948, her father Anglican and her mother Lutheran, so she spent her earliest years there. However, most of her formative years were at a boarding school for missionaries' children in Surrey, together with her older sister and younger brother.

Christian values were deeply engrained at Ruth's school as well as at home, but she was an independent spirit and needed to find her own path. As a teenager, she was attracted to mythology and mysticism and started to attend Quaker meetings. She always had an enquiring mind and was sensitive to beauty in all its forms – natural, musical, literary and artistic. She was also a warm, empathetic person which showed itself, not only in her capacity for deep, intense friendships, but also in her choice of career. She studied history at Durham and, subsequently, social work at Birmingham University and the London School of Economics, after which she worked as a hospital social worker in Wolverhampton and London.

In 1953, Jack was a founder member of the International Society for Music Education and, in 1960, joined the London University Institute of Education as lecturer in the Music Department. During this period, he developed an interest in Indian and Malayan music and encouraged his students to do likewise.

Jack and Ruth married in 1960. Their first home was in Blackheath, Ruth now being a research worker at the Maudsley Hospital. The arrival of children, Richard in 1964 and Romilly in 1966, gave them both immense joy and satisfaction but put Ruth's career on hold.

In 1967, Jack was appointed Director of Music at the College of Arts, (later Deputy Principal), Dartington Hall, a post he held until 1987. Here, through Exeter University, he developed an innovative music degree course, including courses on World Music, Music in Society and Classical Music of North India. One of his other achievements was to introduce the Indonesian gamelan to the College. Jack published many influential books on music education in the 1950s and 1960s including a series of songbooks, in collaboration with Roger Fiske of the BBC, designed to encourage singing in schools at all levels and 'The Slow Learner and Music'. He also pioneered the development of music therapy in Britain, chairing the newly formed British Society for Music Therapy in 1960.

At this stage of her life, Ruth's hands were full with domestic commitments at their home on the Dartington estate, Barton Farmhouse, which involved entertaining a stream of visitors

and colleagues, but she managed, also, to do part-time social work for Devon County Council as part of the children and families team in Newton Abbot.

Jack and Ruth are remembered with deep affection by colleagues and students who were with them at the College where they clearly wove their Quaker values into everyday life. Once a month Meetings for Worship were held at their home which were notable for their warmth, hospitality and spirit of inclusiveness. Jack held Music Department meetings in a way similar to Quaker Meetings for Worship for Business. Thus, he would not be drawn into pronouncing a course of action from his position of authority but, after patient listening to alternatives, would say that, as agreement had not been reached, the subject would be considered again at another meeting.

Whilst living at Dartington, Jack was appointed Quaker Prison Minister at Channings Wood prison, a post in which he was very much supported by Ruth. Even after having left Dartington, on retirement, they returned fortnightly to conduct a Meeting for Worship.

When Jack retired, in 1987, he and Ruth moved to Oxford, temporarily, so that Jack could study theology, where he was awarded a DPhil, the subject of his thesis being 'Authority and the Early Quakers', which was published some years later. Ruth, also, signed on for a higher degree, an MPhil at Bristol University, on premature babies and the separation stress suffered by their families.

During his retirement, Jack wrote some booklets which are still very much appreciated in Quaker circles. In 'Nourishment for the Journey', he describes our lives as two simultaneous and connected journeys – one outer, physical and the other inner, spiritual. This balance between inner and outer, the need for us to withdraw into a still, quiet centre which provides the wellspring for our activity, and Quaker witness in the world, is also reflected in 'The Desert and the Market Place' and, frequently, in his ministry. In his own life, he made time at the beginning of the day which was sacrosanct, nourishing himself through prayer, reflection, reading and music.

He was, above all, fortunate in his marriage to Ruth. Indeed, he might not have been able to take on so many, and varied, activities if it had not been for Ruth's devotion and skill in managing most of the practical tasks of maintaining the household, alongside her own professional life.

Jack was a man of deep spirituality, warmth and humour, whose ministry was unforgettable. He would always find time to listen to others, whatever their beliefs, and was completely non-judgmental, a quality particularly appreciated by those he met in prison. Ruth was deeply serious and strongly independent, but also had a warmth and gaiety that made her a joy to be with. She was kind, hospitable and totally against violence of any kind.

Words cannot describe the shock and horror felt by all who loved her when, during a rare cultural visit to London, she was killed by a run-away bus on New Year's Day, 2007, the driver who, ironically, was of Indian origin, having had a blackout. Jack survived her by just seventeen months

It may truly be said of Jack and Ruth that they followed the Quaker dictum to 'let your life speak'. They brought a spiritual depth and wisdom to our Meeting in Totnes which we miss to this day, but the legacy of their lives unquestionably lives on.

They are survived by their two sons, Richard and Romilly and two grandsons.