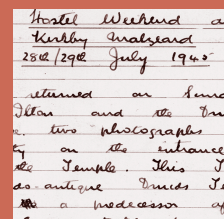
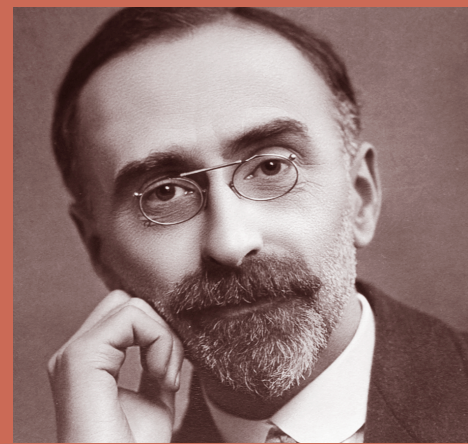


SWARTHMORE'S CENTURY

**A LEEDS EXPERIMENT
IN ADULT EDUCATION
1909-2009**

by Tom Steele



**With foreword by
Martin Wainwright**

SWARTHMORE'S CENTURY

A LEEDS EXPERIMENT IN ADULT EDUCATION

1909-2009

by Tom Steele

Findings Summary

Founded in 1909 by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), radically to broaden the education of its Adult School leaders in biblical and theological matters, Swarthmore is one of the oldest adult education centres in Britain. Thousands of adult learners have benefited from its combinations of liberal, vocational and creative arts programmes over the last century. It has remained a relatively independent centre, running its own affairs through its Council, while playing an important part in the City of Leeds' broader adult education provision, and attracting a considerable reputation nationally. Funding changes over the years have required Swarthmore frequently to tailor its programme, but it has demonstrably retained its identity as a welcoming place of student-centred education, a centre for the creative arts, a weathervane for innovatory reform, and a focus on the social purpose of adult education.

Foundations

The atmosphere in which it first saw light was highly charged with the ethical socialism of the late 19th century West Riding, which saw the phenomenal growth of the co-operative movement, the rise of the trade union movement and the birth of the Independent Labour Party. It was formed as a result of what was known as the Quaker Renaissance, which tried urgently to find the relevance of Jesus's teaching to social injustice and the economic exploitation of working people. This movement was led by Yorkshire Quakers, particularly the Rowntree family of York, but also the Harvey, Whiting and Ford families. Inspired by the success of Nicolae Grundtvig's Danish Folk High Schools, they attempted to create a similar kind of adult education in Britain. They were inspired also by the creation of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in 1903 and its attempt to recruit the universities into the serious business of workers' education through the Tutorial system. To this they tried to add a spiritual dimension based on Quaker teaching.

Democracy

Although initially a charitable 'Settlement' governed by its patrons, by the mid 1920s it had, through its Student Guild, developed the beginnings of a student democracy. The Guild at first organised Swarthmore's social activities to enhance the 'Fellowship' that lay at the heart of Quaker associational life, through rambling and cycling groups, debating and conversation. It gradually took a greater role in planning the Settlement's programme and suggesting new educational ventures. By the end of WW2 a change of constitution meant that students could be directly elected onto Swarthmore's Council itself, and established it as an envious model of student democracy.

Provision

The core of Swarthmore's founding programme was undoubtedly Bible studies, closely allied to the WEA/Oxford University Tutorial classes in political economy. However languages and the understanding of other cultures, especially German, were present, as

was the teaching of science and especially biology. Between the wars, language teaching in the context of international understanding broadened and intensified, while Bible studies diminished and Swarthmore hosted an influx of refugees from Nazi persecution. The Arts and Crafts also developed and other liberal studies such as English, philosophy and history became increasingly popular. By the 1960s Swarthmore had developed into a significant creative arts centre with an unparalleled diversity of courses in adult education. The 1970s and 1980s saw it opening its doors to radical campaigning groups, the introduction of Arts Fellowships and innovative forms of Access, often leading the educational way forward in the North. In the last two decades it has increasingly targeted educationally deprived groups through contracts with providing agencies and has become a substantial 'social entrepreneur'.

Structure of the Centenary History

Swarthmore has passed through a number of phases to its present position a hundred years later. These closely inform the chapter structure and can be roughly summarised as follows:

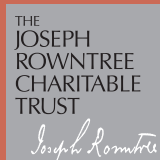
- The founding phase as a College for leaders of Quaker Adult Schools 1909-1920, linked with WEA and Oxford University Tutorial classes in social studies. A strong stance against war and the social evils of capitalism attracted highly committed students – and considerable controversy.
- An increasingly secular adult education evening school, teaching languages, social studies and the arts, attracting a broader, largely working-class constituency, and the beginnings of student democracy through its Students Guild, 1920-1930.
- Between the wars it developed its languages courses into a kind of centre for internationalism and attracted many refugees from Nazi persecution in Europe. During WW2 it also offered a large programme for the Army Pay Corps, 1930-1950.
- Following WW2, in a decade long rift with the WEA, it lost some of its radical social purpose and refocused on a more 'spiritual' approach to the arts and literature. However new arrangements with Leeds City Council secured its financial base.
- During the 1960s it became a vibrant Arts Centre, offering a wide range of courses in the arts and crafts and creative writing, which established a strong identity. The rift with the WEA was mended, and a substantial programme of social studies was once more offered.
- This broad programme of liberal arts and social studies was developed and expanded during the 1970s and 1980s and its open door policy attracted a wide range of campaign groups – and more controversy. Swarthmore developed some of the first Access and Second Chance programmes and provision, targeted at the unemployed and other deprived groups. Increasingly Swarthmore was integrated into Leeds City Council's adult education provision.
- Funding crises and national policy changes required that Swarthmore turned increasingly towards accredited courses and a kind of social entrepreneurship. Although much of the arts and crafts programme was retained, in the evenings especially, increasingly day-time provision was for targeted groups through contracted arrangements.

A shining model for independent adult education, almost unique in Britain, Swarthmore continues to face its second century with what, to borrow a phrase, may be called, *'the audacity of hope'*.

Tom Steele is Senior Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow, and Principal Research Associate at the Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge. He was previously a Tutor Organiser for the WEA at Swarthmore, 1975-1988, and ended his full time academic career as Reader in Adult Education at the University of Glasgow in 2003. His books include: *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club*, Scolar Press (1990), *The Emergence of Cultural Studies*, Lawrence and Wishart (1997) and *Knowledge is Power! The Rise and Fall of European Popular Education Movements 1848-1939*, Peter Lang (2007).



With grateful thanks to



ORDER FORM

Order your copy of Swarthmore's century here. £8.99 + p&p

Please send me _____ copies of Swarthmore's Century at £8.99 per copy + £1.80 postage and packing *per item*. (For orders over 7 copies please contact Kirsten McCaskill at Swarthmore on 0113 243 2210 for p&p costs.)

I enclose a cheque (made payable to 'Swarthmore') for £ _____

Name

Organisation (if relevant)

Address

.....

.....

Email

Tel.no

Please return this slip to:

Kirsten McCaskill, Swarthmore, 2-7 Woodhouse Square, Leeds LS3 1AD