

Research Note

Peace Studies at Bradford University – Reflections on Fifty Years

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Abstract

2023 marked the 50th anniversary of Peace Studies – a discipline which has been closely connected with the Quaker community – at Bradford. Peace Studies as an academic centre of teaching and research at Bradford University was set up in 1973, starting its first postgraduate course in 1974 and welcoming its first undergraduate students the following year. It would not have been established without the determination of a group of Quakers to see such a centre in a UK university, and this Research Note looks primarily at the first 25 years and how the department came about and survived the many internal and external challenges. It also includes some personal reflections, as I joined the department 45 years ago and have retained a close connection through to the present.

Keywords

Peace Studies, University of Bradford, Quakers, pacifism, Cold War, Defence Studies, history of higher education, recollections

Origins

The year 2023 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Peace Studies at Bradford, a discipline and department that have been closely connected with the Quaker community. Peace Studies as an academic centre of teaching and research at Bradford University was set up in 1973, starting its first postgraduate course in 1974 and welcoming its first undergraduate students the following year. It would not have been established without the determination of a group of Quakers to see such a centre in a UK university, and this Research Note looks primarily at the first 25 years and how the department came about and survived the many internal and external challenges. It also includes some personal reflections, as I

joined the department 45 years ago and have retained a close connection through to the present.

At the start of the 1970s a small group of Friends, mainly in the north of England, developed a concern to see the study of peace firmly embedded in an academic institution.¹ The UK had some able individual scholars and one small but notable research group, the Richardson Institute based in London, but no fully fledged department organised to provide courses and programme through to doctoral level. After much discussion and individual meetings with university staff, the Friends determined to work with the University of Bradford in West Yorkshire to raise funds for a School of Peace Studies.²

Bradford University

It is helpful to mention the circumstances that marked out the university as peculiarly suited to the new venture. Bradford is a post-industrial city of close to half a million people, its climate, topography and proximity to resources enabling it to come to the fore in the nineteenth century as one of the world centres of the woollen textile trade, leading to rapid urban expansion and attracting thousands of immigrants from continental Europe. People from Germany, Poland, Ireland and other countries, some of them skilled weavers, were more recently joined by tens of thousands of people from South Asia, especially Pakistan. Intense competition and a lack of investment foresight in the post-war years led the woollen industry in Bradford to go into steep decline from the 1960s onwards, although engineering, chemical and service industries did continue.

In this climate of change, the 1960s were also seeing rapid developments in higher education. New universities on greenfield sites, such as Essex, Sussex, Warwick, Lancaster and Stirling, were all established, and some existing technology colleges, such as Bradford, Salford and Aston, were awarded university status. In Bradford itself, a city-centre Mechanics Institute had been set up in 1827 to provide technical training for the burgeoning industrial town and this evolved into a Technical College in 1887, subsequently becoming a substantial centre for science and engineering education. Eighty years after the technical college had been set up, the Bradford Institute of Technology was established in 1957 as one of a small number of Colleges of Advanced Technology, mostly based in the UK's industrial cities, with Bradford gaining university status in 1966.³

1 The early history of Peace Studies is covered in Whitby, S., 'A History of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford', University of Bradford, MPhil thesis, 1993.

2 Together with Robert McKinlay from the University, the Friends responsible for raising the funding for the Department were Kenneth Lee, Cedric Smith, John Kay, Arthur Hewlett, Frank Edmead, George Murphy, Alec Horsley and Ernest Stockdale

3 For a history of Bradford University in the context of the city, see McKinlay, R. A., *University of Bradford: Origins and Development*, May 1991, published by Bradford University.

Thus, when the Quaker initiative to establish a peace centre came to Bradford a very few years later it was to a centre for advanced technical education, not in itself an attractive environment for an initiative drawing heavily on the humanities and social sciences. What set Bradford apart was the concern of the university's academic leadership to balance its existing expertise with new areas of study, and in its first few years its leadership set out to develop interdisciplinary centres in several areas, including Development Studies, European Studies, and Science and Society, as well as one of the UK's first university schools of management.

Early Challenges

Much of this drive was down to two people, Ted Edwards as vice chancellor and his deputy, Robert McKinlay. Edwards was Bradford's first vice chancellor and was in post from 1966 to 1978. Known as 'Red Ted', he was a well-known education radical and strongly committed to interdisciplinary learning, and both he and McKinlay, himself a Quaker, were highly supportive of the proposed peace centre. As a result the Friends launched a national appeal to establish the schools and this was remarkably successful, raising £75,000 (around £1 million at current prices) in a matter of weeks during 1972, and the following year Adam Curle, a Quaker and highly experienced mediator at Harvard, was appointed as the first professor of Peace Studies in the UK.⁴

From 1974 the first MA students arrived, followed by undergraduates in 1975, the latter run as a 'sandwich course' with students enrolling for four years with the third year spent in relevant employment or voluntary activity. Both programmes attracted highly motivated students and, from the start, Adam, who quickly became something of a guru figure, sought to develop the Peace Studies programmes in a highly innovative manner, involving a minimum of formal assessment with extensive student inputs into the curriculum. This frequently worked well, especially with mature students who often had extensive relevant experience of peace issues, and made for a very lively environment. The downside was that drop-out rates were high, especially among younger students coming straight from conventional schools. Completion rates for the MA programme were initially very low but then improved substantially.

Perhaps more difficult was that Peace Studies was located in a conventional university that expected a more established form of assessment, but Adam also found that, just as students were highly motivated, so were staff, the two together having unintended consequences. Adam expressed it towards the end of the five years he spent at Bradford in an internal unpublished paper in my possession:

it came as something of a shock and a surprise that our people, staff and students of all sorts, were apt to be difficult, contentious and quarrelsome. I had naively thought that the concern for peace that drew them to Bradford would also draw

4 <https://www.bradford.ac.uk/library/special-collections/>.

them to each other. And this was certainly the case with quite a number of gentle and loving young people. But with so many others, the very commitment and strength of feeling that interested them in peace and had led them into activism of various sorts, created angry sectarian divisions between them.

He spent much of his time peacemaking among staff and students and sometimes ‘longed for a quiet life with responsible and co-operative colleagues and quiet, well-behaved students’, but it was his approach and, as he later said, ‘my reward was the friendship and intimacy of many of them.’

One of the core controversies in the study of peace has long concerned the use of violence. One might expect ‘no violence under any circumstances’ to be the automatic approach, but, as Adam pointed out, another view was that ‘unless we try to stop violence being done, as for example by Latin American military tyrannies, we are conniving at, and indeed passively participating in that violence – far better to pick up a gun and bring it to an end.’ That controversy has at some stage affected most centres for peace studies anywhere in the world. In Bradford it has never been fully resolved, but in a positive way it has led to much work on conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding.⁵

Transition

Adam Curle’s health had not been good for some time and he retired early in 1978, his successor being James O’Connell, dean of arts at Ulster Polytechnic (now the University of Ulster). A former Catholic priest, James was Nigeria’s first professor of government and came with the difficult job of trying to combine the vigour of Peace Studies at Bradford with the requirements of a university. While a far more conventional academic than Adam, he was from Cork, had little regard for the British establishment and, though soft-spoken, proved himself to be a highly competent political operator. Indeed, he proved singularly effective in the mid- and late 1980s, when the department came under strong external pressure from the Thatcher government.

Between 1979 and 1982, many debates, disputes and discussions among staff and students saw the department introduce much more formal assessment, but also play something of a national role in providing ideas and information during the rapid rise of a substantial anti-nuclear movement during one of the most dangerous periods of the Cold War that saw the deployment of new nuclear missiles in Europe, including the US ground-launched cruise missiles at Greenham Common and the Soviet SS-20 ballistic missile. It also acquired a reputation for some of its critical assessments of the Falklands/Malvinas War

5 For a discussion on this issue in the context of a wider introduction to peace studies see Rogers, P., ‘Peace Studies’, chapter in Collins, A. (ed.), *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6th edn, 2022.

in 1982, prompting one bit of graffiti I recall hearing about: ‘they used to hang traitors but now they give them degrees in peace studies’.

While Peace Studies at Bradford in the 1980s was frequently in the public eye because of the tensions in East–West relations, this did not reflect its full range of studies and research. These included work on gender relations, human rights, environmental security, specific areas in conflict, including Northern Ireland and the Middle East, and a substantial increase in work on conflict resolution. The department was also the base for one important project, the Alternative Defence Commission. This worked to develop non-nuclear defence policies for the UK, a project funded by the Lansbury House Trust with support from Quaker trusts.

Quaker support has extended to much of the Department’s work over the years. The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Barrow Cadbury Trust combined to support the development of an expanded PhD programme during the 1980s, and just as significant has been the work of the Quaker Peace Studies Trust (QPST). This was set up right at the start of the initiative of those Friends when they were raising the funds to establish peace studies at Bradford and has been a continuing source of support, especially in responding to student hardship, and continues to the present.⁶

After the Cold War

A key period in the further development of peace studies at Bradford was 1989–92, with the sudden end of the Cold War. Many of the more conventional international relations departments in the UK, especially those orientated towards international security, struggled to come to terms with a substantially changed global security environment, but not so Peace Studies at Bradford. Instead, the wide-ranging work described above, especially on conflict resolution, meant for a relatively easy transition.

James retired in 1993, by which time the university had moved to three-year appointments for heads of department. I did two terms from 1993 to 1999, followed by Oliver Ramsbotham, Shaun Gregory, Davina Miller and David Francis, with the department later joining the university’s development studies centre to form the present-day Department of Peace Studies and International Development. This is currently headed by Professor P. B. Anand, Professor of Public Policy and Sustainability, and enrolls over 300 Masters students each year, as well as continuing the undergraduate and doctoral programmes.

What is Peace Studies?

Peace studies in the early decades of the twenty-first century is an established and thriving field with a range of journals, a number of research institutes, such

6 <https://quakerpeacestudiestrust.org/>.

as the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), many centres in universities and colleges, and an international body, the International Peace Research Association (IPRA). In countries of the Global South there has been an increase in peace studies because of the need to enhance conflict prevention, conflict resolution, reconciliation and post-conflict peacebuilding.

As an area of work peace studies is still evolving, but Ramsbotham lists a number of features that mark it out as a defined field of study:

Underlying causes. Peace studies goes well beyond the absence of war to work towards societies that are intrinsically more peaceful. This may mean addressing a wide range of inequalities, whether rooted in class, race or gender divisions, with these analysed at a range of levels from the individual and community through to the international.

Interdisciplinary approaches. Peace studies is rooted in an interdisciplinary approach given the complex and multifaceted nature of violent conflict. Scholars may be drawn primarily from the social sciences, including political science, international relations, economics, sociology and anthropology; they may also come from the life and physical sciences and mathematics. This leads to conceptual enrichment, but can also cause disputes about appropriate methodologies and theoretical frameworks.

Non-violent transformations. Priority may commonly be given to peaceful dispute settlement through mediation and nonviolent transformation, but this should not involve endorsing the status quo, since unjust and oppressive systems are seen as some of the chief causes of violence and war. The legitimacy of the use of force in certain circumstances remains a matter of difference, not least in the case of humanitarian intervention in internal conflicts.

Multi-level analysis. The embracing of a multi-level analysis at individual, group, state and inter-state levels in an attempt to overcome the institutionalized dichotomy between studies of 'internal' and 'external' dimensions that are seen to be inadequate for the prevailing patterns of conflict. This is seen as particularly significant given the relative decline of inter-state conflict and the rise of sub-state conflict and is also seen as relevant in analysing the tendency towards 'trans-state' conflict.

Global outlook. Peace studies seeks the adoption of a global and multicultural approach, locating sources of violence globally and regionally as well as locally and draws on conceptions of peace and nonviolent social transformations from all cultures.

Analytical and normative. Peace studies is both an analytic and a normative enterprise. Some seek to ground peace studies in quantitative research and comparative empirical study, but most scholars have been drawn to the field by ethical concerns and commitments. Large-scale violence and war are not seen as inevitable features of the international system, but as consequences of human actions and choices.

Theory and practice. Linked to this is the close relationship between theory and practice in peace studies. While a clear distinction is persistently made between peace studies and peace activism, peace researchers very frequently engage systematically with non-government organizations, from policy think-tanks through to campaigning movements. Some may well see this as part of a process of the testing of theoretical insights, regarding it also as a two-way process.⁷

The UK Scene

As well as Bradford, there are now other centres in the UK. The Richardson Institute continues as a research centre within the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University, Leeds Beckett University has Peace Studies programmes and hosts the annual Olof Palme Lecture, and Coventry University has the Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations. Other universities have substantial elements of peace studies and research, including Manchester and Winchester, and the University of Ulster hosts the International Conflict Research Institute and also runs an MSc programme in Peace and Conflict Studies. The *Journal of Pacifism and Nonviolence* was founded in 2023 and elsewhere in the academic spectrum the *Journal of Critical Military Studies* was started in 2015. The Conflict Research Society, an independent group drawing mainly on the academic and policy communities, frequently has contributions from peace scholars.

Reflections

I joined Peace Studies at the start of 1979 from an unconventional background. I had studied Life Sciences at Imperial College and then did a PhD in plant pathology before working for the East African Community on a regional crop research programme. Developing a strong interest in environmental and resource security, I then spent eight years at Huddersfield Polytechnic helping to develop and then teach on an interdisciplinary degree programme in Human Ecology. From 1979 to 2010 I worked in Peace Studies at Bradford, then retiring to work part-time for seven more years, but still maintaining links, including some guest lecturing.

Reflecting on over 40 years at Peace Studies, several elements stand out. One of the periods of most intense pressure was in the mid-1980s, when just about every piece of work on nuclear arms and arms control and other aspects of East–West relations was subject to considerable academic and political scrutiny, yet considerable value came from it. We had to produce high-quality research because of the

⁷ Rogers, P. F. and Ramsbotham, O., ‘Then and Now: Peace Research Past and Future’, *Political Studies* XLVII (1999), pp. 740–54.

level of scrutiny forthcoming from others and this certainly improved the quality of the output. We also attracted many able and committed students.

Somewhat surprisingly, we also found that the military were more than willing to engage with us. I was first invited to lecture at the RAF Staff College in 1982 and over the past 40 years have taught regularly at the two senior colleges, the Royal College of Defence Studies and the Joint Service Command and Staff College, and have been an external examiner for MA and PhD awards at both colleges. Other staff have been similarly engaged.

One unusual element of the work of many of the staff over the years has been their fulfilling two roles at the same time: conventional academic research as required by the university and applied research outputs for policy groups, campaigners and activists. This may often require ‘double publishing’, which can involve adapting a paper originally written for an academic journal for a much wider circulation. This does, however, put an additional workload on staff, which is not recognised in terms of teaching commitments in what is, after all, a conventional university.

For the future there is a strong argument for the view that Peace Studies, at Bradford or elsewhere, has its greatest challenges still to come. The global situation is one of a socio-economic marginalisation within and between countries. This is intensifying and combines with the onset of environmental limits to growth as exemplified by loss of biodiversity and an increasingly fraught process of climate breakdown. Complicating this is a strong tendency to see security challenges as threats that require military action. In response there is good work underway on the need for economic reform, the potential for rapid decarbonisation is far higher than a decade ago and even the vexed issue of the nature of security is being addressed by initiatives such as the Alternative Security Review.⁸ Beyond all of these initiatives, though, is the need for thorough interdisciplinary research and this is a role for which peace research is particularly suited.

Author Details

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8 <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/find-out-more/alternative-security-review/>.