

*Youth Hostel Pioneer: Peace, travels, adventure and the life of Jack Catchpool.* By Duncan M. Simpson. DuncanMSimpsonwriting, 2020. ii + 243 pp., softback. ISBN: 978-1-71311063-7 £9.99

Duncan Simpson spent most of his working life employed by the Youth Hostels Association where he came to realise the importance of the contribution of Jack Catchpool to the growth and success of the organisation. Catchpool had been associated with the Youth Hostel movement, which originated in Germany, from 1936 until his death in 1970.

Jack Catchpool came from a Quaker family, was married to a Quaker and remained a Quaker throughout his life. Atlee wrote of his strong faith which sustained

him throughout the many trials of his life. Quaker values were imbued in his life's work. Perhaps more important than this was his firmly held belief that by participating in the opportunities offered by the Youth Hostel Association, both at a national and international level, friendship and understanding would be promoted; a belief that by bringing people together from different classes, nationalities and backgrounds, a more peaceful world would result.

To this end he tirelessly devoted himself, travelling extensively, not only in Europe but in remote parts of Asia and Africa. He was fortunate in that this singlemindedness was accepted and enabled by his wife Ruth, who, by caring for the children and maintaining the household during his many absences, made an extraordinary commitment possible.

Duncan Simpson has written a thorough and comprehensive account of Jack Catchpool's life. He tracks the many journeys meticulously and no doubt with great accuracy. He carefully integrates in the text, the ideals of the movement with those of Catchpool. Nor does he shy away from the setbacks to hopes of greater international understanding being promoted by the movement, by the Second World War, and more recently by internal conflicts between those wishing to retain the more relaxed organisation of the past, and those looking for more centralisation. There is also tension between those wishing to increase standards of comfort and those wishing to retain cheaper more basic provisions.

The book asserts the popularity of the YHA, now one of the largest charities and owner of properties worth millions of pounds and accepting millions of overnight stays, employing over 1000 people in the summer. Simpson shows that the idealism of Jack Catchpool and other founders had profound positive features on the movement. Perhaps these aspects are not so apparent today but he demonstrates that youth hostels remain a way for young people to travel adventurously and to meet in fellowship

with a wide variety as they do so.

There are frequent complimentary references to the Society of Friends and the FAU and Woodbrooke particularly feature, but I suspect that overall the book will be of more appeal to those wanting to know more of the history of the YHA movement than about Quaker history. Nevertheless Jack Catchpool must be considered as one of those Friends who have made a significant contribution to wider society.

*Rod Harper*